



**World No Tobacco Day
—31st May 2012—**

The European Institute of Women's Health invites you to celebrate World No Tobacco Day 2012 to work to stop women from smoking. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Europe for women.ⁱ

Women are not aware that they are vulnerable lung cancer. In the past, this cancer has mostly affected men and was considered rare in women. Although more men are diagnosed with lung cancer, incidence is levelling off, even decreasing in men, but alarmingly, it is on the rise in women.

Lung cancer is deadly, yet it is highly preventable. Generally 80-90% of lung cancer is smoking-related, so that the most important step anyone can take to reduce the risk is to stop smoking. This principle applies to many other cancers, respiratory disease, cardiovascular diseases and other conditions.

In Europe lung cancer is the third most common cancer among women. Lung cancer is increasing rapidly in European women, overtaking deaths from breast cancer in the UK and Poland, while it is stabilising or declining among men.ⁱⁱ

“The European Institute of Women's Health is campaigning to step up anti-smoking programmes targeted at young girls and women. Unless we can stop them smoking, we will face a lung cancer epidemic in women in the future,” said Hildrun Sundseth, Board Member, EIWH.

The development of lung cancer depends on complex genetic, hormonal, behavioural and environmental interactions. New data suggest that lung cancer in women takes a different course from in men and that women get lung cancer sooner after they start smoking but they survive longer than men. However, the differences between men and women and their implications for prevention, diagnosis and treatment need to be better understood through continued basic and clinical research.

Lung cancer is the biggest cancer killer worldwide, yet research is significantly underfunded. There are several explanations for this under-investment. Firstly, few lung cancer patients survive long enough to become advocates for increased resources. Also, the stigma of smoking causing the disease is a barrier.

The smoking gap between men and women has been narrowing in recent years. In some EU countries young girls are more likely to smoke than boys. Women damage not only their own health; their smoking also impacts on their children. Children who are exposed to passive smoking have more respiratory diseases, ear infections and other afflictions than children who are not exposed. Later in life, these children are liable to become smokers following the model set at home.

Traditionally, tobacco control policies have taken a broad approach to reduce smoking. However, in order to be more effective, policies and interventions need to be gender-sensitive and targeted at women, especially the poorer, socially disadvantaged and more vulnerable groups. The WHO has recognised this in its Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; in 2010 it focused the World No Smoking Day on young girls and women.

Current tobacco control legislation implemented in many EU countries has raised the hope that the smoking tide can be stemmed, yet it will always remain a challenge to reach the private sphere of the home. Therefore, changes of behaviour must be encouraged and support provided to smokers rather than stigmatising smokers.

In 2012, the EIWH looks forward to the revision of the Tobacco Products Directive and encourages inclusion of generic packaging to help stop the targeting of products towards women and girls. *“Concerted efforts must be made by all stakeholders to make stopping women and young girls from smoking a priority and to secure the political will and the resources to act across Europe,”* said Peggy Maguire, Director General, EIWH.

For more information, contact: info@eurohealth.ie.

ⁱ EUGLOREH. 2007. *The Status of Health in the European Union: Towards a Healthier Europe*. http://euglorehcd.eulogos.it/IXT/_EXT-REP/_INDEX.HTM

ⁱⁱ American Society of Cancer Oncologists. 2009. *Women and Lung Cancer*. <http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Cancer.Net+Feature+Articles/Cancer+Screening+and+Prevention/Women+and+Lung+Cancer?cpsextcurrchannel=1>