

# Shining a light on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

SIOP Europe joined forces with CCI Europe and PanCare for Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in September, urging Europe to recognise that paediatric cancer remains an urgent health and socio-economic issue



**AS** the world continues to confront an extraordinary global health emergency, we must remember that cancer has not gone away. One would expect that it should be 'children first', but it is too often 'children last'. Serious inequalities in access to the best available care and expertise remains a critical issue across Europe. Innovation does not reach children who most need it: only nine anti-cancer medicines were authorised for a specific paediatric indication since 2007, in contrast to over 150 for adult cancers.

On behalf of our childhood cancer community, we extend our deep gratitude to Vice President of the European Parliament, Ewa Kopacz, for championing the institution's endorsement of September's 'Shine Gold' Campaign.

The lighting of the European Parliament building in Brussels during the first week of September brought much-needed visibility to the persistent burden of cancers affecting children and young people; an important signal that Europe's youngest citizens will not be left behind. Our entire European childhood cancer community is delighted that this year's campaign has received such exceptional support.

## The need for change

We are pleased that through the symbolic gesture of lighting the building in gold, the European Parliament

brought it to the attention of us all that too many young lives are still lost to childhood cancer – but that the EU is well positioned to make transformational change possible.

This year's campaign aimed to reach a broad audience across Europe, raising awareness of the stark reality of childhood cancer – the number one cause of death in children over one. The facts highlight the urgency:

- Every 15 minutes in Europe, a family receives the devastating news that their child has cancer;
- Over 6,000 children and young people die every year in Europe from childhood cancer;
- There are 35,000 new cases of childhood cancer in Europe each year. This equates to a football stadium at full capacity;
- Almost 500,000 long-term survivors of childhood cancer live in Europe today. This equates to the population of a large European city, such as Antwerp (Belgium), Lyon (France), or Lisbon (Portugal);
- There is up to a 20% difference in the survival rate of children with cancer across Europe; and
- 10 times less public funding is allocated to childhood cancer research in Europe than in the US. Europe should strengthen its position as a leader in childhood cancer research globally.



More funding is urgently needed for childhood cancer research.

## The need for improvements

Children and young people should be able to benefit from faster and more efficient development of affordable innovative medicines. The cure rate must improve – indeed we must cure more and cure better, as detailed in our Manifesto for the paediatric oncology and haematology community.

Cancer has not stopped because of the coronavirus. The sad reality is that COVID-19 has in fact had a devastating impact on research and clinical trials. The research of today produces the treatments of tomorrow, so it is really important to highlight the challenges that we are facing and we urge all the various stakeholders to continue their work for a brighter future for children and adolescents with cancer.

Together with our members and our partners, we aim to make a difference across the EU and beyond for children and adolescents with cancer as well as for childhood cancer survivors. This year's September

campaign was the first of its kind and we are determined to do more next year.

Since SIOP Europe's office is based in Brussels, Belgium, we are delighted that local Belgian television channels and publications have recognised the importance of this message and featured Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. So far, these local media outlets include RTV, VRT, Het Laatste Nieuws, AVS Television, TV Bruzz, Nieuwsblad, Gazet van Antwerpen, Knack, and we are confident others will follow.

Such positive outcomes are encouraging, and we will continue striving for better awareness of the needs of childhood cancer to foster a brighter future for these brave young people.

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