

**Networks of Expertise:
An Ambitious Vision
for Tackling Healthcare at EU level**

Joint Action on Networks of Expertise on Cancer
an EU funded Joint Action



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Cancer, a challenging group of diseases, is expected to have a 77 percent increase in new cases by 2050. In the European Union, cancer cases are estimated to reach 3.7 million by 2045.¹ Overall, the population of people living with cancer is rising faster than the advancements in science, aimed at treating the group of diseases. This implies that the focus of healthcare services over the coming years will be on delivering care to the population, in the best way possible.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP) anticipated this rise in cases and became the first initiative in the EU to tackle a specific disease, cancer, at the supranational level. It brought together Member States and the European institutions to jointly work together on an area that is a national competence: health.

The Beating Cancer Plan was launched on February 3rd, 2021, the eve of World Cancer Day, and since then it has given rise to 32 key actions and 10 flagship initiatives – addressing the entire continuum of cancer care.

The ambitious Joint Action on Networks of Expertise (JANE), and its seven new networks of expertise based on the concept of **health networking**, was created upon a request from the European Commission in the context of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

What are Joint Actions?

Joint Actions are collaborative projects involving several EU and associated countries with the objective to address key EU health policy priorities – **areas that are both high on the agenda nationally (Member States) and at the EU level.** These direct grants under the EU4Health and Third Health Programmes are implemented by a consortium of national public health authorities nominated by EU countries and involve the non-profit sector, academia and governments/national authorities.



¹ International Agency for Research on Cancer. *Global Cancer Observatory – Cancer Tomorrow*. Accessed 27 August 2024

Health Networks in Cancer: What are they?

Health networks may be defined as networks involving a form of regular collaboration, at a distance, amongst healthcare professionals focusing on items pertaining to the mission of the network². To date, health networking at the EU level has only been attempted via the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive, through the creation of European Reference Networks (ERNs) focusing on rare diseases and rare cancers. Building on the ERN model, the **Joint Action on Networks of Expertise (JANE)** will be shaping **seven new transversal health networks** in oncology, that will transform the way cancer care will be delivered at EU level. These Networks of Expertise (NoE) will be the first of their kind as they will focus on transversal aspects of the disease (as opposed to the ERNs that were focusing on a specific disease). In addition to JANE, a parallel Joint Action is working towards the creation of a European Network of Comprehensive Cancer Centres (CCCs) that will aim to ensure timely and qualitative care provision to cancer patients.



² Casali, P., et al., Health networking on cancer in the European Union: a “green paper” by the EU Joint Action on Networks of Expertise (JANE) – Submitted for publication (September 2024)

The Joint Action on Networks of Expertise (JANE)

JANE is an ambitious Joint Action, stemming from Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP), that aims to shape seven new Networks of Expertise in the area of oncology, focusing on: 1) complex and poor prognosis cancers; 2) palliative care; 3) survivorship; 4) personalised primary and secondary cancer prevention; 5) omics technologies; 6) hi-tech medical resources; 7) adolescents and young adults (AYA) with cancer.

These Networks of Expertise will be the first of their kind and will aim to provide the highest standard of care within the EU - to its citizens and inhabitants - in the area of oncology. If this model works, they can also serve as a pilot for new disease areas or delivering care in general.



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JANE's 7 Networks of Expertise (NoE)

Network of Expertise (NoE) Vision

NoE on Complex and Poor Prognosis Cancers	Empowering hope, extending life: a world where poor prognosis cancer no longer steals futures and equal access to care prevails throughout Europe
NoE on Palliative Care	Establishing a sustainable NoE in palliative care that supports the integration of palliative care into routine cancer care, thereby ensuring that evidence-based PC is available according to patient needs in all EU MSs
NoE on Survivorship	Supporting the integration of evidence-based approaches to cancer survivorship into routine care and to ensure equitable access across EU MSs
NoE on Personalised Primary and Secondary Cancer Prevention	Advancing individualized strategies to prevent disease by integrating genetic, lifestyle and environmental factors into tailored healthcare approaches
NoE on Omics Technologies	Supporting the integration of innovative omics technologies into the standard of care at the different steps of cancer management in a sound and sustainable manner, achieving equitable access to these services for all EU citizens
NoE on Hi-Tech Medical Resources	Providing equal access across Europe to hi-tech medical resources
NoE on Adolescents and Young Adults with Cancer	Becoming the network where collaboration between paediatric and adult cancer services will be strengthened to face the gap of AYA patient survival across EU Member States

JANE 1: 36 partners from 15 Member States and 1 Associated Country (2022 – 2024)

JANE-2: 121 partners from 25 Member States and 4 Associated Countries (estimated 2024 – 2028)



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Why is this **Important for the EU?**

The European Union (EU) is working towards cementing an EU Health Union. A Union that will focus on the mutual agreement of Member States and the European Union, on an area that is currently a national competence. Currently, this Health Union has been tested in the context of serious cross-border threats (i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic) and to an extent via the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive (i.e., the ERNs on rare diseases and rare cancers). The collaboration between Member States and the European Commission has shown us the benefits of cooperation at supranational level.

However, in order to have a strong supranational collaboration in an area that is a national competence, health, Member States and the European Union need to pilot their collaboration in specific areas pertaining to health and healthcare, outside the area of serious cross-border threats and other exceptions.

JANE's seven new Networks of Expertise in oncology, shaped over the next four years, involving the cooperation of 29 European countries, national authorities and key stakeholders, may provide a concrete example in the context of the EU Health Union.



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Challenges to Address Over the Next 4 Years – 2024 - 2028

Despite the ambitious nature of the seven Networks of Expertise, the JANE community is also acutely aware of the challenges that health networks have faced at EU level. If these seven visionary Networks of Expertise are to be shaped effectively, the health, and more specifically, oncology community, with the support of all policymakers needs to work together to address critical open issues³ such as:



- 1 How can we study and innovate the concept of health networking?
- 2 What areas are better suited for health networking at EU level?
- 3 What degree of cooperation and harmonisation should be required of EU Member States to best exploit health networking and give rise to European networks of national/regional networks?
- 4 How can the idea of subsidiarity be best interpreted to support health networking in the context of EU Treaties, which basically do not include health?
- 5 How should the concept of a “network of networks”, i.e., the national/regional network counterparts to the European networks, be developed?
- 6 How should EU health networks be funded and with what degree of cooperation between the EU and national levels?
- 7 How can a system of EU networks integrated with national networks be best organized and funded, e.g., should the costs be split between the EU and Member States?
- 8 Should EU health networks be shaped as legal entities or could they give rise to secondary legal entities, also with a view to fundraising?
- 9 How should health networks be best shaped to advance cancer research?
- 10 How should the EU regulatory system be updated to exploit such impulse to health networks, in view of the EU General Data Protection Regulation and the new EU Health Data Space?
- 11 How can artificial intelligence be exploited today within health networks and to what extent will it be able to overcome challenges such as the current lack of interoperability of electronic health records and the language barrier across the EU?
- 12 How should health networks involve patients and their groups, with regard to their formal role within EU health networks?
- 13 Within health networks, which are the areas where patients and their groups should be best involved, e.g., production of clinical practice guidelines, the design of investigator-driven clinical trials, EU regulatory decisions on medicines and devices, health service data governance, identification of unmet needs?

These critical issues are addressed in greater detail in a Green Paper authored by the Joint Action on Networks of Expertise, entitled *Health networking on cancer in the European Union: a “green paper”*.⁴

³ Casali, P., et al., Health networking on cancer in the European Union: a “green paper” by the EU Joint Action on Networks of Expertise (JANE) – Submitted for publication (September 2024)

⁴ Ibid.



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Shaping the EU Networks
of Expertise on Cancer

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