

Measures to improve cancer situation in Cyprus

On Dec 7, 2023, in a meeting of the House Health Committee in Cyprus, members of Parliament applauded the Cypriot Government's decision to allocate €1.2 million towards the establishment of a National Cancer Institute in the country. This came after much public discourse and disagreements following the Government's earlier decision to exclude the allocation from its 2024 state budget.

Participants in the meeting discussed the cancer situation in Cyprus and the country's national strategy to combat malignant diseases. They pointed out that a National Cancer Institute will help to improve upon the currently available cancer services, bolster cancer research for better cancer treatment, and collaborate with other European countries for advanced research, diagnosis, and treatment. It would also act as a supervisory authority, developing protocols and certification, and devise strategies to coordinate with the existing cancer departments in the country.

According to Pavlos Drakou (National Cancer Committee, Cyprus), the pertinent bill to set up the institute needs to be developed as quickly as possible and must be submitted promptly to the plenary for voting.

With a current population of over 1.26 million people, Cyprus has one of the highest incidence rates of cancer among children and adolescents in the world.

Loizos Loizou (University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus) told *The Lancet Oncology*, "Recently, the first ever population-based cancer epidemiology study showed that cancer incidence rates between 1998 and 2017 are among the world's highest in 0–19-year-old Cypriots. Only Italy and Belgium have higher rates." According to Loizou and colleagues' study, published in 2022, in the

0–19 years age group, for all cancers combined, the world age-standardised incidence rate per million children and adolescents per year was 203.54 in Cyprus.

According to the European Cancer Information System's data, in 2022, Cyprus recorded 2337 new cancer cases and 1266 cancer deaths among males, and 2300 new cancer cases and 979 cancer deaths among females. For males, the most common cancers included prostate; trachea, bronchus, and lung; and colorectal cancer. For females, the most common cancers included breast, thyroid, and colorectal cancer.

Konstantinos Makris (Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus) told *The Lancet Oncology*, "In Cyprus, significant temporal trends in the age-standardised incidence rates for two hormonal cancers such as breast cancer and thyroid cancer during the last two decades have been particularly notable and puzzling. To understand the cancer risk factors in the country, we need systematic epidemiological surveillance schemes—eg, an adult cohort population-monitoring programme. However, no cohort has been actually set up yet in Cyprus for assessing cancer epidemiology and risk factors among adults, despite our attempts."

He added, "A cohort study called Children First has been recently set up among children in Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Albania to evaluate the environmental risk factors that could be associated with primary school children. Interestingly, both childhood and adult thyroid cancer incidence rates in Cyprus are among the highest globally."

A 2023 study assessing projected lung cancer incidence by 2035 in 40 countries across the world estimated an age-standardised incidence rate of 48 per 100 000 person-years among males for Cyprus in 2035, just below

the highest projected rate of 49.3 for Belarus.

Christiana Demetriou (University of Nicosia) told *The Lancet Oncology*, "Faced with the increasing cancer burden, the EU has responded with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the EU Mission on Cancer." She said, "Cyprus cannot afford to be a bystander and needs to take urgent action to align itself with these initiatives. To achieve this and address the critical issue of cancer at the national level, the revision, but most importantly the implementation, of a comprehensive national strategy for combating cancer is imperative."

Demetriou continued, "The multifaceted strategy needed to tackle such a pervasive health challenge should adopt a holistic approach that encompasses prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, and quality of life of cancer patients and survivors."

She added, "The National Cancer Institute can serve as a centralised hub for research, prevention, treatment, and support, fostering collaboration among experts, health-care providers, and policy makers to significantly reduce the burden of cancer and improve the overall wellbeing of the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus."

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For more on the **establishment of a National Cancer Institute in Cyprus** see <https://cyprus-mail.com/2023/12/07/govts-urn-on-national-cancer-institute-praised-by-mps/>

For the **study by Loizos Loizou and colleagues** see *Cancer Epidemiol* 2022; **80**: 102239

For the **European Cancer Information System 2022 data** see [https://ecis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/explorer.php?50-051-CY52-All54-1,253-All56-0,8555-2022,202257-7,85CEstByCancer-\\$X0_8-3\\$CEstRelativeCancer-\\$X1_8-3\\$X1_9-AE27\\$CEstBySexByCancer-\\$X2_8-3\\$X2_-1-1](https://ecis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/explorer.php?50-051-CY52-All54-1,253-All56-0,8555-2022,202257-7,85CEstByCancer-$X0_8-3$CEstRelativeCancer-$X1_8-3$X1_9-AE27$CEstBySexByCancer-$X2_8-3$X2_-1-1)

For the **lung cancer study** see *JMIR Public Health Surveill* 2023; **9**: e43651