

Welcoming Remarks - Dr Françoise Meunier

High-Level Conference on Ending Financial Discrimination Against Cancer Survivors | 15 February 2024

Dear Ministers, Dear Commissioners, Dear Colleagues of the Royal Academies of Medicine, Dear Members of the European Parliament, Distinguished Guests, Dear Cancer Patients & Survivors, Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I am truly honoured to stand before you today as we gather for the High-Level Conference on Ending Financial Discrimination Against Cancer Survivors. I extend my warmest welcome to each and every one of you who have taken the time to be part of this crucial dialogue to protect cancer survivors.

We have to face that: one European in three will contract cancer in their lifetime.

Five European citizens receive a cancer diagnosis every minute.

Thanks to the progress of medicine, cancer is no longer a guaranteed death sentence. Yet, cancer still has a tremendous impact on the body and the mind of patients and affects the resilience of families.

Throughout my career and my personal life, I have witnessed the damage of cancer and many of you in this room, including the cancer survivors who have agreed to share their stories with us today, have experienced this directly.

Considering the terrible impact the disease takes on patients, they should not have to keep suffering after they've finally overcome this ordeal. They should be able to forget and resume the activities that they were forced to put aside throughout their treatments and until they recovered. They should be able to realise their aspirations, whether personal or professional. They should not be constantly reminded and discriminated against when seeking employment, adopting, or seeking insurance or a loan.

Before we start our discussions, I must express our collective sorrow at the passing of Professor Véronique Trillet-Lenoir, an oncologist and an MEP who should have been with us today. Her dedication and contributions to the field of cancer and cancer survivorship have left a lasting mark, and her absence is strongly felt among us. In her memory, we embark on

this conference with a renewed commitment to address the challenges faced by cancer survivors and strive for a future free from financial discrimination.

It is no coincidence that we have chosen to convene on International Childhood Cancer Day. This day serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerability of the youngest members of the community, highlighting the urgency and importance of our mission to end financial discrimination against cancer survivors across all age groups.

These children are the adults of tomorrow. It is imperative that we provide them with the opportunity to move forward without the burden of the disease that affected their childhood. We owe it to them to ensure that they can embrace their futures with hope and optimism, free from the financial barriers that cancer survivors often face.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of my initiative and dedication to protecting cancer survivors from financial discrimination, through what is commonly referred to as the right to be forgotten. Through tireless research and advocacy, I have been able to raise awareness of the discrimination cancer survivors face when seeking a loan or insurance because of their medical history. Too often, they are refused a service, or unjustly asked to pay extremely high premiums, preventing them from realising their projects. While financial discrimination is only a part of the discrimination that cancer survivors face, it is an important issue to address as financial liberty is a means to one's dreams.

In 2016, France was the first country to adopt a law on the right to be forgotten, raising awareness of the problem at hand at the highest political level. A similar law was implemented in Belgium in 2020. Today 8 EU Member States have adopted legislation, and in 5 countries codes of conduct or self-regulatory measures are in place. This brings hope to the cancer community, but progress is slow – indeed, all EU cancer survivors deserve to be protected from financial discrimination, no matter their nationalities or their country of residence.

Today, let us keep in mind the collective responsibility we bear. Together, we have the power to shape policies, challenge discriminatory practices, and pave the way for a society where every cancer survivor is treated with dignity, equity, and is granted the right to be forgotten. Together with determination and good will we have the capability to change the world. Thank you for your commitment to this vital cause, and I look forward to the transformative

discussions we will have today that will, hopefully, shape the future for European cancer survivors.

All of this is only possible if we have a good screening process in order to make an early diagnosis which has tremendous impact on the survival rate.

That is the reason why, I am pleased to give the floor to Prof Stefan Constantinescu, the president of the Federation of European Academies of Medicine who will further explain recent achievements

Thank you.

Dr Françoise Meunier

Founder of the European Initiative on Ending Discrimination against Cancer Survivors & Member, Académie Royale de Médecine de Belgique (ARMB)