

# High-Level Conference Highlights Progress and Urges Further Action to End Financial Discrimination Against Cancer Survivors Across the EU

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Discrimination against cancer survivors continues to hinder their reintegration into society once cured, primarily due to the financial barriers they are confronted with as a result of their medical history. The High-Level Conference on Ending Discrimination Against Cancer Survivors, convened to address this pressing issue, marks a pivotal moment in the quest for equitable care and support for survivors.

At the heart of the discussion lies the imperative need for the **"right to be forgotten"** a crucial policy principle which ensures that survivors's financial situation is considered based on their current health status rather than past medical history. This is a significant step forward in recognising that survivors deserve a fresh start after battling the life-altering disease that is cancer.

The right to be forgotten is of particular importance for individuals who suffered from cancer as **children or young adults** as they constitute the target population likely to seek financial services.

As of 2024, eight EU Member States have enacted binding legal measures to combat financial discrimination against cancer survivors. France initiated this movement by passing the Right to be Forgotten law in January 2016, **followed by Belgium in April 2019**. Since then, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Cyprus, and Italy, have joined this endeavour.

Yet, despite these strides, the road to end financial discrimination for all EU citizens is still paved with challenges.

The High-Level Conference on Ending Discrimination Against Cancer Survivors convened European and national stakeholders in a resolute demonstration of collective commitment to combating financial discrimination. Organised under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the conference aimed to address the financial hurdles cancer survivors face post-recovery.

“Belgium has introduced the Right to be Forgotten in 2019 and was a forerunner in the implementation of that necessary protection mechanism for patients with cancer or chronic diseases. Once cured, patients should not have to suffer twice. This is not about compassion, it is about scientific evidence: if doctors speak of complete recovery, why should a financial institution discriminate against them?” - **Frank Vandenbroucke, Belgian Minister of Health and Social Affairs**

## One Unified Message: Protecting All Cancer Survivors

### Harmonised EU legal framework:

Stakeholders emphasised the need for a harmonised legal framework at the European level to protect survivors' financial rights throughout the EU. As such, stakeholders called upon European policymakers to prioritise the creation of such an EU-wide legal framework in the next legislative cycle, drawing from the successful experiences of Member States with existing legislation. Several Member States have identified a period of five years after the end of oncological treatment and in the absence of relapse as the suitable period after the right to be forgotten should apply.

### Supporting Implementation Network:

Acknowledging the time required to establish an EU-wide legislation, stakeholders proposed the creation of a supporting network of Member States to ease the implementation. This network, led by a group of Members of the European Parliament dedicated to the cause, would enable the sharing of best practices and support the adoption of national legislation in Member States where none currently exists.

The resounding voices of determination echoing from the High-Level Conference on Ending Discrimination Against Cancer Survivors underscore a collective pledge to protect cancer survivors against financial discrimination, strengthen European solidarity and prepare for a future free from discrimination against cancer survivors.