FOREWORD

Commercial Determinants of Cancer Control Policy

With the increasing burden of cancer on populations, health systems and the consequent tremendous impact on societies, there is a moral, economic and social imperative to step up efforts to reduce cancer incidence and mortality. Broadening the discussion on cancer policy is urgent because almost everyone can be affected by cancer in their lifetime, either directly or indirectly through their loved ones. Moreover, understanding the broader determinants is crucial for governments so that they can provide the most effective (and cost-effective) interventions.

Despite well-established evidence on the link between cancer and certain risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol, processed meat etc., gaps remain regarding the way in which the commercial interests of these and other industries influence the burden of cancer on population health. Thus, it is necessary to analyse the commercial determinants and understand their influence, both positive and negative, as a complex set of power dynamics and interests at various levels – from influence at a national level, to the global influence of transnational corporations.

The interplay between cancer and its commercial determinants is complex and constitutes a continuum. The tobacco industry, on the one hand, derives its profits from the sale of a carcinogenic product. In the case of such commercial determinants, the focus of public health policy should be to directly counter their interests and influence. Other sectors, such as the medical technology and pharmaceutical industries, contribute to innovations that improve the outcomes of cancer. Given the size and lucrative nature of the cancer market, these industries will have more nuanced influences on research, development, pricing, and marketing of technologies and medications. In such cases, the public sector should engage in ways that optimises public interests and value to society.

Commercial determinants can also have links with other health determinants, all of which can contribute to the widening of health inequalities. Transparency in these relationships and how they adapt to changes in the policy-making landscape can help ensure that partnerships with the private sector lead to population health gains. Because healthier populations lead to more dynamic and thriving economies, multiple disciplines and perspectives should be part of this discussion, including decision makers, patients, health professionals, professional societies and corporations as well as economists, philosophers and lawyers.

Simultaneously, good governance at different levels is necessary. The precedent established by the WHO’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control shows that strong leadership, combined with committed stakeholders and public awareness, can lead to breakthroughs in public health policy. This is also possible through collaboration with different levels of policymaking in national governments and international organizations, such as the European Commission, to create a legal and political landscape that can lead to improving population health.

This issue of EuroHealth offers a first step towards a deeper understanding of the role that negative commercial determinants may play in cancer policy. The articles discuss the full cancer continuum from prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, medicines and palliative care, and go on to examine related philosophical and behavioural insights and the role of governments and international agencies. Examples of possible actions at policy-level are provided, which can be used to optimise the interaction with the private sector and confront future challenges.

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