

GERMAN CANCER AID AND DKFZ – January 2025

Memorandum on cancer prevention research in Germany

Progress report

With support from

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You can read the memorandum and the progress report online here
 > www.krebshilfe.de/memorandum

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MEMORANDUM ON CANCER PREVENTION RESEARCH IN GERMANY PROGRESS REPORT

1. BACKGROUND

In October 2023, the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) and German Cancer Aid published a Memorandum on Cancer Prevention Research in Germany, calling on policymakers to take consistent steps to implement prevention measures and in particular to address the shortcomings in prevention research. More than 30 experts highlighted areas of action that require more research. They issued specific recommendations on targeted measures to promote cancer prevention research, to implement individual prevention programs, to improve the population's health literacy, and to help put in place appropriate structures.

The Memorandum on Cancer Prevention Research stressed that consistently implemented prevention measures in the field of primary prevention and early detection can contribute to a considerable reduction in cancer incidence and mortality but that these opportunities have not been sufficiently harnessed in Germany to date. The memorandum particularly emphasized that promoting the entire range of cancer prevention research was a necessary condition for making more effective use of the existing potential in future. It also highlighted the need for strategic coordination of targeted measures with national and European initiatives and for promoting cooperation between different institutions and disciplines to a greater extent.

The memorandum was sent to 320 decision makers in the health and research policy sector with a view to drawing political attention to the importance of cancer prevention.

The present progress report analyzes the current situation in Germany, particularly with regard to the potential of national initiatives for injecting fresh momentum to help shape the future of cancer prevention research. The aim is to document the status of implementation of the memorandum and to ensure that the momentum that has been generated in cancer prevention in Germany is maintained in the long term.

The report showcases achievements to date, highlights persisting challenges, and draws the attention of policymakers and the research community to the need for further measures to promote cancer prevention and early detection. Moreover, it is designed to put forward the case for continuing support for cancer prevention initiatives, to underline their importance, and to intensify networking opportunities between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with a view to maximizing the effectiveness of prevention strategies and measures on a lasting basis.

Consistent primary prevention and early detection measures can contribute to a considerable reduction in cancer incidence and mortality.

2. PROGRESS AS PART OF NATIONAL INITIATIVES

National Decade Against Cancer

Prevention was identified as one of the three priority areas in the National Decade Against Cancer. A Working Group on Prevention was subsequently set up and began by pinpointing two particularly urgent areas of research, namely the increase in cancer rates among young people and the options offered by individual risk prediction as a basis for targeted early detection. Taking account of, among other things, the present memorandum, on which several members of the Working Group on Prevention collaborated, key issues papers were drawn up on the need for research in these areas. These papers have already resulted in invitations to tender being issued by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and German Cancer Aid and can be assessed on the basis of successfully initiated research projects. Four networks have begun work under BMBF's funding guidelines on research networks for the prevention of bowel cancer in younger and future generations. A total of eight networks and projects were selected for funding as part of coordinated tender procedures by BMBF and German Cancer Aid on funding for research projects on risk-adapted early detection. The Working Group on Major Unanswered Questions in Cancer Research provided additional input. Cancer survivorship, a topic that includes key areas of research and application in tertiary prevention, was proposed across all the working groups as a core topic for the second half of the National Decade Against Cancer and was taken up in the guidelines on funding for research networks on molecular causes and tertiary prevention of long-term and late effects in long-term survivors of cancer. These measures addressed relevant shortcomings as set out in the memorandum and resulted in targeted invitations to tender for funding. The results of the ensuing research projects suggest that there is considerable potential for translating them into better cancer prevention.

National Cancer Plan

In the context of the National Cancer Plan launched in 2008, which is designed as a coordination and cooperation program for all key actors in the fight against cancer, a series of measures were initiated that have contributed to further developing oncologic care and the early detection of cancer in Germany. As part of the realignment of the National Cancer Plan, which began in November 2024 when the new steering group was formed, primary prevention of cancer is to be taken up for the first time as a new priority area. By prioritizing cancer prevention, the National Cancer Plan has considerably strengthened its key aim of making joint progress in the fight against cancer in Germany and redressed a serious shortcoming in the plan. A positive development that deserves particular mention is also the fact that BMBF and DKFZ will be more heavily involved in the steering group of the National Cancer

Plan in future, thus facilitating the dovetailing of initiatives in applied prevention and prevention research. In order to establish cancer prevention as a long-term priority, specific prevention topics now need to be defined and addressed in working groups in a structured manner with a view to making effective progress in achieving the common goals in the fight against cancer.

National Cancer Prevention Center (NCPC)

DKFZ and German Cancer Aid have agreed to establish the National Cancer Prevention Center as part of a long-term partnership. Designed as a comprehensive prevention center, it will combine high-level prevention research, training and continuing education, public relations work, and policy consulting under one roof. The center will pursue a translational strategy – from basic research through to the introduction of new methods in evidence-based and increasingly personalized prevention programs. Starting out from NCPC and including further partnerships across Germany, particularly with German Cancer Aid's Comprehensive Cancer Center and One NCT, evidence-based cancer prevention will be expanded with an increasingly nationwide reach.

To address the lack of young researchers in the field of cancer prevention, German Cancer Aid has launched a graduate program – the only one of its kind in Germany. The program is based at NCPC and supports a total of 13 international doctoral theses in 11 innovative and multidisciplinary projects at seven partner institutions. These projects cover priority research areas that the memorandum also identified as areas with a considerable need for research, namely public health, communication, and biological mechanisms. To supplement this Cancer Prevention Graduate School, DKFZ and German Cancer Aid will be organizing a Summer School on prevention for the first time in September 2025. The Summer School, which medical students from across Germany will be able to attend, will boost the position of cancer prevention in medical training on a lasting basis and increase students' interest in the topic.

As a way of enhancing the visibility and status of cancer prevention research and of recognizing outstanding achievements in this field, DKFZ launched the German Prize for Cancer Prevention Research, sponsored by a philanthropic foundation; the prize is awarded every two years in recognition of achievements by young scientists and by established researchers in the field of prevention or early detection of cancer.

The results of the research projects initiated by the National Decade Against Cancer indicate that there is considerable potential for them to be translated into better cancer prevention.

Starting out from the National Cancer Prevention Center, evidence-based and increasingly nationwide cancer prevention will be expanded in Germany.



Image Source: dkfz

The middle section of DKFZ'S new building complex houses the National Cancer Prevention Center.

DKFZ and German Cancer Aid also organize the International Conference on Cancer Prevention Research (ICPP), which has been taking place in Heidelberg every two years since 2018 and supports the creation of a global research community from all fields of prevention research. Prior to that, there were no international conferences that covered the entire range of prevention research, so the conference has filled a real gap.

National Cancer Prevention Week is a joint initiative by German Cancer Aid, DKFZ, and the German Cancer

Society with which the three organizations draw attention to the great potential of cancer prevention. Every year, the campaign focuses on a particular lifestyle factor that affects the risk of cancer. National Cancer Prevention Week is geared both to the general public and to political decision makers and has become established as an indispensable instrument for disseminating prevention approaches. Eliciting a broad response, the campaign makes a key contribution to raising awareness about the importance of prevention.

Several new research departments have now been established at NCPC, some of which have already been staffed. Moreover, an interdisciplinary Prevention Board has been set up to promote interdisciplinary research and networking. In addition, construction work on the new NCPC building in Heidelberg began in mid-2024. Thanks to extensive additional private funding, specific research laboratories can be set up in this new building; these labs are designed to make major progress in research on exercise and diet, two key areas of prevention. At DKFZ's site in Dresden, construction work is also under way on the first NCPC satellite site.

NCPC is currently being established solely using DKFZ's and German Cancer Aid's own funds along with considerable philanthropic donations. Crucially, NCPC must be enabled to set up a nationwide outreach program in order to ensure that the prevention measures can be implemented throughout the country and that long-term results are achieved in cancer prevention. This would create the necessary conditions for innovative cancer prevention research and for implementing new approaches in cancer care.

National Cancer Prevention Week is geared both to the general public and to political decision makers.

German Science and Humanities Council

As an advisory body on science policy, the German Science and Humanities Council (Wissenschaftsrat) has also begun addressing the topic of prevention and organized a symposium with participants from the research community, society, politics, and the media in May 2024. In connection with the symposium, the Council called for an initiative on prevention and health in Germany. It clearly identified the following factors as key to better prevention: better data, networking between all actors, binding political objectives, effective incentives for health-conscious behavior, greater emphasis on prevention in medicine, communication geared to the specific target group, and model projects with scientific support focusing on overarching goals. In future, the German Science and Humanities Council and its Medical Committee aim to continue to look at how prevention can be mainstreamed more effectively in everyday life within society and at how a paradigm shift can be achieved on a binding basis in the field of health care and medicine to adopt an approach focusing more heavily on maintaining health. The symposium helped draw the attention of the public and of policymakers to the topic of prevention. It remains to be seen what further steps will follow and what momentum can be generated from this initiative.

FORMS OF PREVENTION



Primary prevention

Preventing cancer before it develops – by adopting a healthy lifestyle.



Secondary prevention

Detecting cancer at an early stage so that it is easier to treat.



Tertiary prevention

Preventing recurrence of cancer after patients have recovered.

3. FURTHER NEED FOR ACTION

Intensive work still needs to be carried out to mainstream cancer prevention research at a structural level.

The initiatives mentioned here have generated key momentum for the further development of prevention and prevention research. At the same time, the fundamental demands and need for action set out in the memorandum published by German Cancer Aid and DKFZ continue to be fully valid.

› www.krebshilfe.de/memorandum

Mainstreaming cancer prevention research at a structural level, securing appropriate long-term funding, and establishing a comprehensive national prevention program are tasks that have yet to be completed and require intensive work.



Image source: German Cancer Aid

4. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The initiatives and developments described in this report highlight the fact that cancer prevention in Germany has in recent years increasingly attracted the attention warranted by the potential it offers. Looking ahead, it will be crucial to consistently drive the systematic development of health and cancer prevention research in Germany and to step up interdisciplinary cooperation. While the National Decade Against Cancer particularly focuses on promoting prevention research and closing research gaps, the inclusion of cancer prevention as a topic in the National Cancer Plan and the initiative by the German Science and Humanities Council will open up the chance to drive a paradigm shift in the health sector geared to focusing more heavily on preserving health. In future, as a key actor, NCPC will be responsible for developing, evaluating, and disseminating evidence-based approaches as a bridge between prevention research and care. In order to develop a long-term, evidence-based cancer prevention strategy for Germany, German Cancer Aid and DKFZ will be initiating a National Cancer Prevention Summit in mid-2025. This summit will build on a broad range of actors to pool the perspectives of a wide variety of stakeholders from the research community, politics, the health sector, and civil society. The recommendations for action that are developed will undergo independent scientific monitoring to ensure that they are implemented and are effective; they will also be reviewed on an ongoing basis to align them with the current level of knowledge. This integrated approach offers considerable potential for strengthening cancer prevention research in Germany on a sustainable basis.

In addition to the initiatives that have been mentioned, the comprehensive political will to focus on prevention research and health promotion will be required in order to move from a purely curative to a prevention-based form of medicine. A comprehensive and sustainable transformation of the health sector can only be achieved if policymakers invest in promoting prevention measures in the long term and if they initiate the relevant structural changes.

*ICCP: International Conference on Cancer Prevention
 **NCPC: National Cancer Prevention Center

2018
 ICCP*
 (every 2 years)

2019

National Decade Against Cancer
 › Working Group on Prevention

2020

Strategic partnership German Cancer Aid/DKFZ
 › Establishment of NCPC**
 › 1st National Cancer Prevention Week (since then annually)

2021

German Prize for Cancer Prevention Research launched
 (every 2 years since then)

2022

Launch of the Cancer Prevention Graduate School

2023

Memorandum on Cancer Prevention Research in Germany

2024

Groundbreaking ceremony for NCPC**
German Science and Humanities Council symposium
Realignment of the National Cancer Plan

2025

Progress Report on the Memorandum
Summer School for medical students
National Cancer Prevention Summit

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STRENGTHENING CANCER PREVENTION ON A SUSTAINABLE BASIS

National Cancer Prevention Center

The German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) and German Cancer Aid have agreed to establish the National Cancer Prevention Center with a new building in Heidelberg as part of a long-term partnership. The aim is to combine high-level prevention research, training and continuing education, public relations work, and policy consulting under one roof and to implement them nationwide using outreach programs and networking. Researchers from various disciplines will team up to conduct research on cancer prevention here – from basic research to implementation in practice. In addition, a prevention outpatient clinic and an information center for the population will be established. The aim is to develop prevention programs geared toward the target groups with a view to ideally benefiting everyone in Germany. More information is available here > www.dkfz.de/ncpc



National Cancer Prevention Week

German Cancer Aid and DKFZ announced the first National Cancer Prevention Week in September 2019 to mark the start of their partnership. The German Cancer Society (DKG) became a partner of the campaign in 2021. The three organizations use the week to draw attention to the great potential of prevention. Every year, the campaign focuses on a different lifestyle factor that affects cancer risk. More information is available here > www.krebshilfe.de/krebspraeventionswoche



