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EU Cancer Plan rightly puts healthy diets centre stage

Today, the European Commission has unveiled [a new plan](#) to turn the tide against cancer. Unhealthy diets as well as overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for cancer. BEUC welcomes that the EU Commission wants to help prevent cancer by making healthy food choices easier for consumers. However, it is a disappointment that some measures on ending EU-funded ads for meat have been watered down in the plan's final version.

Flagship food-related EU measures include:

- **Alcohol labelling:** Before the end of 2022, the European Commission will come up with a proposal for mandatory labelling of ingredients and nutrition information on alcoholic drink labels.
- **Marketing to children:** By 2022, it will evaluate EU governments' efforts to curb children's exposure to unhealthy food ads.¹
- **Meat promotion:** The European Commission will review the EU promotion policy to bring it more in line with healthy eating recommendations, including regarding foods linked to cancer risks, such as red and processed meat. An early draft of the Cancer Plan had suggested the Commission was considering a complete phasing out.

Monique Goyens, Director of BEUC, commented:

"With as much as 30% of all cancer cases linked to poor diets,² the EU can make a big difference supporting consumers in eating more healthily. The Cancer Plan is a promising step to improve consumers' access to healthy diets.

"Overweight and obesity are well-known risk factors for cancer. And few of us know that **alcoholic drinks** can be calorie bombs, as a glass of wine can contain as many calories as an ice cream. Compulsory nutrition and ingredient labelling on alcoholic beverages will help consumers know what and how much to drink. It is a relief that the EU finally acted to improve alcohol labelling.

"Industry pledges and other self-regulation tools have proven toothless in **protecting younger consumers from ads praising foods loaded with sugar, fat or salt**. Should

¹ As part of their implementation of the EU Directive on Audio-visual Media Services' provisions concerning children's protection from inappropriate commercial communications for HFSS foods.

² World Health Organisation (WHO). [Cancer linked with poor nutrition](#). February 2011.

Member States do too little to restrict unhealthy food marketing to children, the Commission should not shy away from taking binding measures.

“It beggars belief that **EU money is still being spent promoting red and processed meat**, whereas experts tell us we should be eating less of it to minimise cancer risks³. Not only will cutting down on red and processed meat benefit our health, but it will also reduce our food footprint. Yet, [a survey](#) we published last year found that many consumers find it difficult to lower their red meat intake, even though our consumption in Europe is well above what is recommended for human and planetary health. It is only common sense that the EU must stop funding ads for meat.”

ENDS

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³ See World Cancer Research Fund: <https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/limit-red-processed-meat>

