

## Shaping the Future of Cancer Research: Key Takeaways from the First Annual Meeting of the ‘Understanding’ Cluster

The first annual meeting of the **EU Cancer Mission’s Understanding (tumour-host interactions) Cluster** held in January 2025 brought together leading cancer researchers, policymakers, and patient representatives at IDIBAPS’ Esther Koplowitz Centre in Barcelona. The event, organised by the THRIVE project, aimed to strengthen collaboration and shape policies to advance Europe’s fight against cancer, in line with the EU’s **Beating Cancer Plan**. In this joint press release, we share the key takeaways and how they will shape the cluster’s future work.

### EU Cancer Mission: our Cluster’s goals and vision

The **Understanding (tumour-host interactions) Cluster** unites six EU-funded research projects – ARTURO, GLIOMATCH, HIT-GLIO, MULTIR, SPACETIME and THRIVE – under the **EU Cancer Mission**, which seeks to improve the lives of over three million people by 2030. While each project focuses on different aspects of tumour-host interactions, they share a common goal: translating scientific discoveries into real-world benefits for cancer patients. To advance this shared goal, partners from the six projects collaborate on common topics. At the cluster’s annual meeting, project representatives met to share progress in each area and define concrete steps to drive research, strengthen patient engagement, and influence policy for equitable access to cancer treatment across Europe.

### From science to impact

Research alone is not enough. To drive real impact, findings must be effectively communicated, policies must support innovation, and patient involvement must be prioritised. **Marianne da Silva, the cluster’s Project Officer** from the **European Health and Digital Executive Agency**, joined the meeting in person. She provided valuable input, outlining the EU Cancer Mission’s goals for the cluster, expectations for concrete policy recommendations and the available resources to support the cluster’s work, setting the stage for discussions on data sharing, regulation, and patient-driven innovation and joint communication. Her guidance offered a clear thread for addressing shared topics in line with EU priorities, available resources, and realistic joint impact.



### Common data strategy

An important pillar of the cluster’s work is developing a common approach to data management. In a workshop during the annual meeting, participants discussed the types of data generated across projects and how to best manage and share this information. These insights formed the basis of a working document that will undergo consultation with an EU expert on the **UNCAN platform** - Europe’s initiative to harmonise and share cancer research data. By aligning with UNCAN and EU data regulations, the cluster aims to improve data-sharing across European cancer research, accelerating discoveries and improving patient outcomes.



### Overcoming regulatory barriers

Collaboration between projects enhances efficiency and impact, but regulatory hurdles, such as GDPR complexities, can slow progress. To address this, the cluster agreed to work towards a policy recommendation to the European Commission advocating for standardised, GDPR-compliant data-sharing templates and clearer guidelines. By streamlining these procedures, researchers can collaborate more effectively across borders, leading to faster breakthroughs and improved cancer treatments. The key takeaways were incorporated into the cluster’s first policy brief deliverable.

## Addressing inequalities in cancer care

Cancer survival rates and treatment accessibility vary significantly across Europe. To tackle these disparities, the cluster identified key barriers to patient support and treatment access during the meeting. This resulted in a commitment to developing policy recommendations that address these inequalities. A dedicated working group leads follow-up discussions and is working on proposals for policymakers to help improve equitable access to cancer treatments across all regions.

## Enhancing patient and citizen engagement

Patient involvement is essential to ensure research addresses real needs. The cluster committed to strengthening engagement by partnering with local and European patient advocacy groups and citizen-science initiatives. By sharing patient networks and event opportunities, projects will increase patient participation in research and decision-making. This collaborative approach will amplify patient voices and ensure scientific advancements lead to tangible improvements in care.



## Impact through communication & dissemination

Effective communication is key to maximising impact. The cluster has developed accessible resources, including an introductory brochure and [video](#), to engage a wider audience. Joint public outreach initiatives will ensure that the cluster's work, scientific progress and broader societal impact are communicated clearly and accessibly. By bridging the gap between research and society, these efforts will support all other cluster objectives – from policy influence to patient engagement – ensuring that European cancer research reaches and benefits the wider public.

## A unified effort for meaningful change

The *Understanding (tumour-host interactions) Cluster* is more than a research initiative; it is a collaborative force driving policy change, scientific innovation, and patient-centred progress. This first annual meeting set the stage for continued joint efforts, ensuring that cancer research delivers on its ultimate promise: improving outcomes for patients across Europe.

## Contact

More information on the *Understanding (tumour-host interactions) Cluster* projects and our joint materials are available on the project websites and social media channels.



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