

EUROPEAN COUNTRIES CONSULTATION:

Anchoring EUCCC Certification
in National Realities

WP5 – Inclusion, Certification and
Adherence to EUCCC Certification

ESTONIA COUNTRY PROFILE



Co-funded by
the European Union

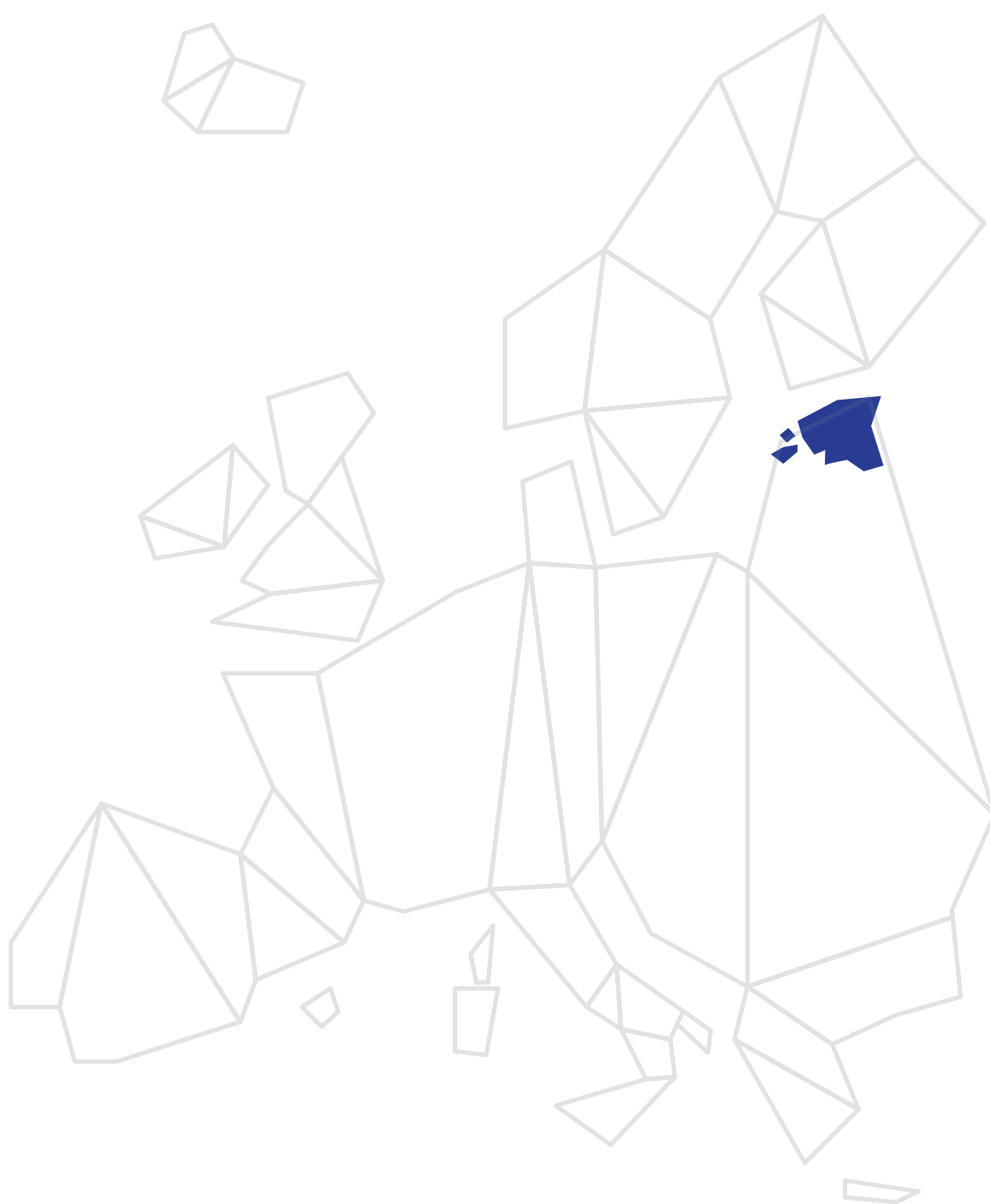


THE EUROPEAN COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTRE NETWORK





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Context: existing certification systems and organization of cancer care

Mandatory quality reporting but no national certification is in place

Estonia does not currently operate a mandatory national certification scheme for healthcare facilities. However, healthcare providers must obtain a licence to receive public funding. The type of licence granted depends on the provider's capacity to deliver different forms of treatment. Hospitals may also undergo additional verification linked to funding agreements.

In 2013, the Advisory Board for the Development of Quality Indicators was established in cooperation with the University of Tartu and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund. The board members are clinicians who have taken a leading role in the development of quality monitoring indicators. The reports on quality indicators for neurology, oncology, intensive care, gynecology, surgery and psychiatry have been published since 2017. Additionally, the reports present surveillance indicators for clinical guidelines and feedback indicators for health providers.¹

New developments, including a forthcoming Quality Strategy Plan, aim to improve care quality while reducing administrative burden—a key concern given the shortage of medical staff. Certification remains voluntary and is not foreseen as mandatory in the near future. Facilities may, however, pursue certification if they perceive added value in doing so.

Organization of cancer care

Estonia is undertaking a reorganization of its cancer care system to improve service quality and ensure appropriate centralisation.

Currently, adult cancer care is mainly delivered in three cancer centers in the north and south of the country, while paediatric cases are treated in two regional hospitals – one in north and one in south.

Radiotherapy is available in 2 regional hospitals, surgery is performed in 2 regional and 1 central hospital and systemic therapies are available in 3 hospitals. Smaller hospitals mainly provide systemic care under the oversight of the cancer centers. Further centralisation is planned, with ongoing discussions regarding the redistribution of surgical services by cancer site to ensure sufficient expertise. Centralisation of high-technology services and those requiring a high level of expertise is foreseen, while nursing palliative, and follow-up services are envisaged to be decentralised.

The Estonian Cancer Control Plan for the period 2021–2030 is a public health programme designed to reduce the number of cancer cases and deaths and improve the quality of life of cancer patients. It is structured around 15 main themes that align with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. Among key priorities of the cancer control plan we can identify:

- Central management, strategic planning and evaluation – a comprehensive set of cancer control measures (screening programs, organization of cancer care...)
- Uniform diagnostic, treatment and follow-up guidelines across healthcare institutions
- Scientific research and quick implementation of research results in practice
- Uniform high-quality structured data

The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for implementing the objectives of the Cancer Control Action Plan. The second phase of the plan implementation (2026–2030) is under preparation and the focus areas will be set after mid-term evaluation of the plan.

With the aim to improve cancer research and care, the Ministry of Social Affairs financially supported the establishment of Estonian Cancer Network (ESTCAN). The network is a consortium of 10 founding partners that provide cancer care in the country: 4 hospitals, 2 universities, Ministry of Social Affairs, National Health Development Institute, National Health Insurance Fund and Estonian Cancer Society. The network is structured around three pillars: i) research, development, innovation, ii) training and education and iii) clinical collaborations.

In terms of data, the Health Development Institute maintains the national cancer registry and national screening registry.

Identified barriers towards the implementation of EUCCC certification in Estonia

- The biggest challenge to EUCCC certification for Estonian cancer centers is the research component. There is limited research funding specific to cancer, which complexifies its development. Besides the bottlenecks to intensify clinical research is the implementation of dedicated time for clinical research, limited workforce for clinical studies and also limited international/regional collaborations.

Identified enablers towards the implementation of EUCCC certification in Estonia

- The size of the country is Estonia's challenge as well its strength. While it faces some of the challenges common to other smaller countries such as difficult access to clinical trials, it also built on its capacity to create a strong collaborative network and is working towards a unified cancer care system. There is excellent collaboration between medical staff, universities and policy makers.
- There is a high degree of political support for advancing cancer care. The recent change of government does not constitute a barrier in the upcoming years, the development of cancer care and services being one of the promises of the electoral campaign.
- In addition, comprehensive cancer infrastructure is being developed among ESTCAN members, and the Ministry of Social Affairs is planning strategic hospital network development.
- Another facilitating element is the national health information system, allowing healthcare professionals quick and easy access to patient information.

Conditions for successful EUCCC certification implementation in Estonia

Although the issue of uniformisation of cancer care can be in part solved with the creation of ESTCAN, the EUCCC certification can further contribute to those efforts. It could help develop standard patient pathways used by all cancer centers and align practice through the use of common clinical guidelines.

- Strengthening cross-border partnerships to ensure access to care

There is difficult access to clinical trials and certain types of innovative therapies. These two issues might be tackled within EUCCC network by establishing formal partnerships.

Even though cross-country collaborations are advancing, mostly with Nordic and Baltic countries, they are mostly based on personal relationships and lack formal structure. Although funding issues would have to be resolved between ministries and/or public payers, the EUCCC network could facilitate the establishment of formal agreements.

- Consortium-based aspiring CCC within ESTCAN

There is an ambition to certify a consortium-based comprehensive cancer center composed of members of the ESTCAN network – 4 hospitals and Tartu University. Other institutions, such as Technical University in Tallinn and National Health Development Institute, are willing to join if their participation proves necessary in order to fulfill certain criteria.

For the consortium, the EUCCC certification process is perceived as an effort to improve cancer care within the institutions involved; even if the certification is not obtained there is a strong conviction that the process itself will have a positive impact on the quality of care.

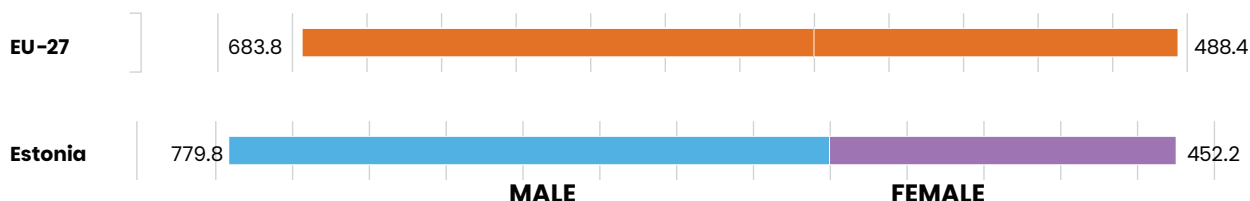
Number of OEI-certified CCCs: 0

Number of EUCCC pilot centers: 1

Epidemiology: incidence, mortality and survival rates

Incidence rate:

Estimated incidence, both sexes, all sites but non-melanoma skin, 2022 (per 100 000 population)



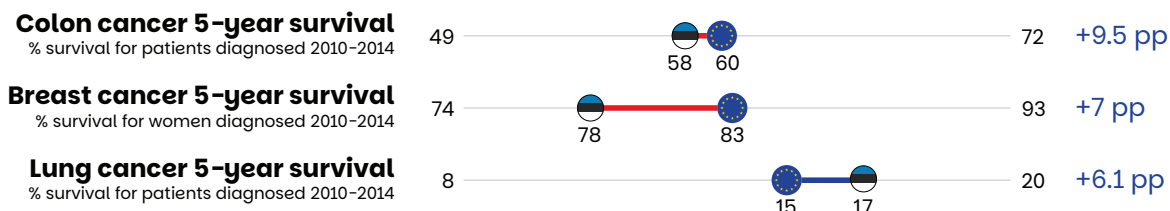
Mortality rate:

Cancer mortality
ASMR per 100 000 population

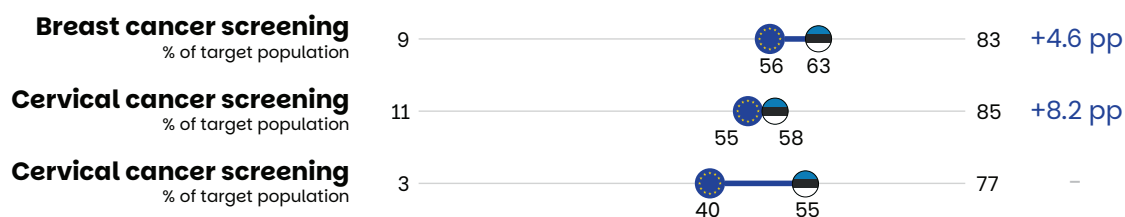


Survival rates:

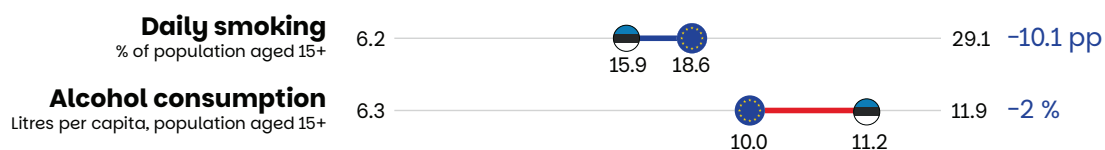
For the selection of cancers:



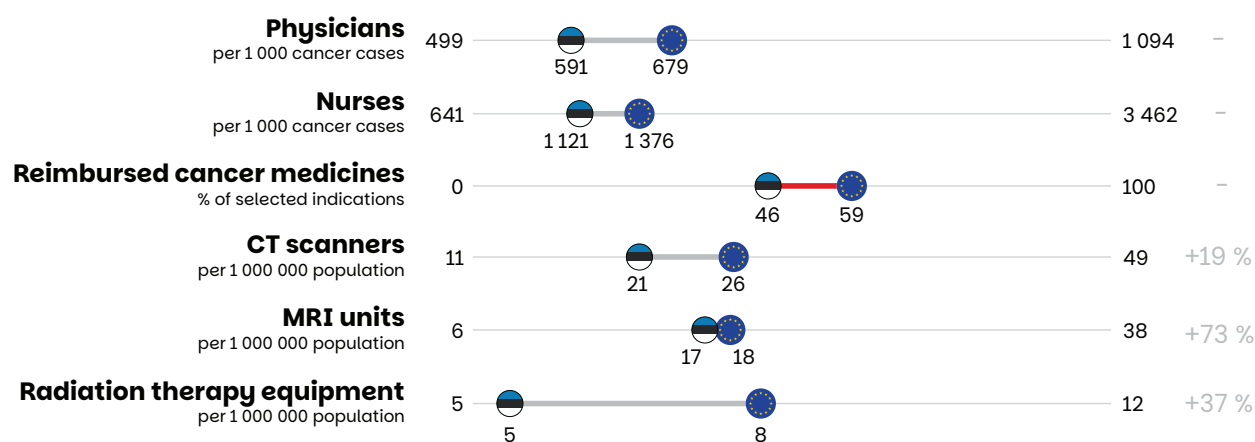
Screening performance



Risk factors



Human resources and infrastructure



Number of clinical trials: 71

Endnotes

1. 'Estonia: Health System Review 2023'. Accessed 23 December 2024. <https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/i/estonia-health-system-review-2023>.



**For more information,
please contact:**

eunetcccwp5@has-sante.fr