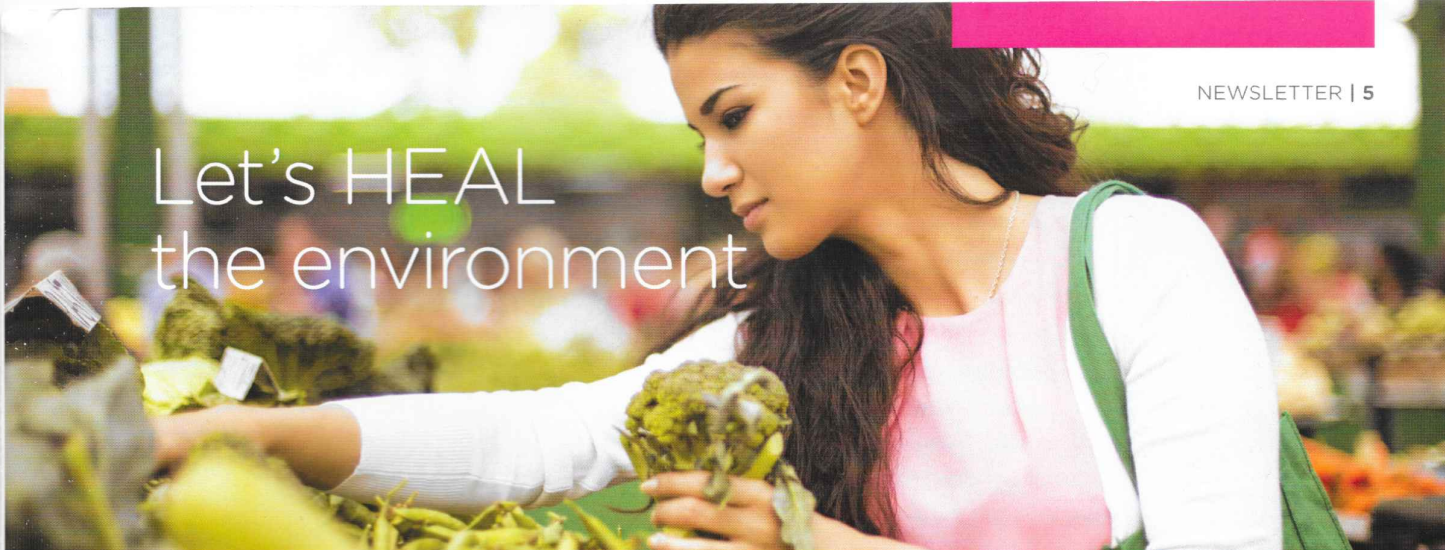


Let's HEAL the environment



"Breast cancer cases in women has almost doubled during the past 30 years in Europe due to living during a period in which our exposure to chemicals in the air and everyday products has grown rapidly," keynote speaker Genon K. Jensen told the 'Not Beyond Us' conference on World Cancer Day



In the 1960s, a woman had, approximately, a one in 20 chance of developing breast cancer. It is now one in eight in the UK. During this period, there has been an increase in environmental chemical loads in our bodies, particularly with chemicals that are known to be able to mimic our own hormones.

Ms Jensen significantly holds the role of Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), which she set up in Brussels, Belgium, in 2003. For over a decade now, the organisation has been working to bring attention to opportunities regarding the prevention of chronic conditions, including cancer, through the promotion of a less toxic environment.

The theme of the conference, dealing with the link between air pollution and cancer, coincided well with the work and research done by the keynote speaker, presented in her presentation titled 'The role of environmental policy as a level for cancer prevention'. Ms Jensen's work has been instrumental in bringing the health impact of chemicals and pesticides, climate change and air pollution to the EU political agenda in a process involving the European health and medical community.

"We were incredibly pleased with this choice of theme as it is a big part of our work at the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and many of our members across Europe and globally are working on cancer prevention," she said.

Both Ms Jensen and European Commissioner for the Environment Karmenu Vella said air pollution and exposure to harmful chemicals in everyday products are two important interventions that can contribute towards developing cancer, while mentioning the opportunities that exist for policy change at European level to help close the current gap in cancer prevention efforts.

"Knowledge about the opportunities to prevent cancer through environmental policy change is growing very rapidly," said Ms Jensen. Within the last two years, the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) cancer agency (IARC) has officially recognised air pollution as a contributor to lung cancer while discovering a link between higher levels of air pollution and an increased risk of bladder cancer.

"The scientific evidence linking pollution and other chemical exposures with various forms of cancer has been mounting for decades but this official acknowledgement of environmental contributors to cancer is very important, particularly for those who are debilitated and die from these conditions every year," said M. Jensen.

When asked what each individual can do to minimise exposure to toxic chemicals in food and everyday products, Ms Jensen suggests the following:

1. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.
2. Buy organic food whenever possible.
3. Avoid unnecessary exposure to chemicals, particularly garden and indoor pesticides, homecare products, such as paints and detergents, and personal care products including cosmetics.
4. When possible, instead of using sunscreen to avoid sunburn, keep in the shade or cover up with loose fitting but tightly woven clothes and a hat.
5. Do not microwave food in plastic containers or wrapping.
6. Visit or write to your government representative or Member of the European Parliament (MEP) to express your concerns about hormone disrupting chemicals and their links to breast cancer. Ask for tighter controls over synthetic chemicals that disrupt our hormone systems.