



Annual Report 2021
The Nordic Cancer Union

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Nordic Cancer Union

www.ncu.nu

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NCU in short



The NGOs play a very important role in cancer control. This is especially true for the Nordic countries. In our region, the cancer societies have long history, they have founded cancer registries, funded cancer research and provided services for cancer patients and their near ones. Furthermore, they work together!

Sakari Karjalainen
NCU chairman

The Nordic Cancer Union (NCU) was founded in 1949 to enhance collaboration between the cancer societies in the Nordic countries. Its main aim is co-operation on relevant strategic issues, exchange of experiences, and to be a forum for inspiration for the Cancer Society of Finland, the Icelandic Cancer Society, the Swedish Cancer Society, the Norwegian Cancer Society, the Faroe Cancer Society and the Danish Cancer Society.

Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023

In August 2017, the NCU Board decided that the existing Strategic Plan 2015-2018 would continue in the period 2018-2020. The board discussed again in March 2021, whether the original strategy is still valid. It was decided to continue with the current strategy but a need for an amendment to specify the NCU's future priorities was recognized. These should include, for example clinical research and consider the recent EU Beating Cancer Plan's priorities. The work with updated priorities will continue in 2022. NCU's strategic plan can be found on NCU's website <https://ncu.nu/about-the-ncu/strategy/>

Chair and secretariat

A board comprising representatives of each of the member organizations directs the NCU. The chairman of the board is responsible for the NCU's function during a three-year mandate period. The strategies and priorities for the NCU are stipulated by the board and should be valid during the three-year alternating chairmanship of the member organizations.

The Cancer Society of Finland is responsible for the NCU chairmanship and the NCU secretariat in 2021–2023.

NCU finances, including research grants

The total income of the NCU in 2021 was € 1 235 586 of membership fees.

Every year the Nordic Cancer Union grants € 750.000 to cancer research and up to € 250.000 for strategic activities decided by the board. In 2021, the NCU awarded 12 grants totalling € 750.000 to cancer research. Grants ranged from € 50.000 to € 85.000.

NCU 2021 activities

In 2021, the Finnish Presidency coordinated the collaborative activities and organized

- three NCU board meetings – one meeting in Helsinki and due to the COVID-19 situation two virtual meetings.
- one NCU Scientific Committee meeting – a hybrid meeting in Helsinki, with one committee member and the chairman present, the rest participating via Teams.

Renovation of NCU web pages and intranet

The secretariat was allowed 12.000 euros budget for 2021 to build a new NCU web site and create modernized intranet for storing NCU documents.

The website was technically ready in June 2021 and the first version of it was published at www.nordiccancerunion.nu while the old website was still working at www.ncu.nu. The new site replaced the old one in the beginning of December and new extranet solution was added to the site in September.

Inspirational presentations on selected topics of current common interest

NCU continued to be a forum for exchange of experiences and mutual inspiration for the Nordic cancer societies. The Cancer Society of Finland, the Icelandic Cancer Society, the Swedish Cancer Society, the Norwegian Cancer Society, the Faroe Cancer Society and the Danish Cancer Society shared experience of their own activities.

Interesting presentations on selected topics covering the NCU members' current common interests were heard throughout the year 2021 board meetings:

Global UN Joint Programmes on NCDs and behavioral risk factors: Strengthening linkages to cancer prevention and control by Daniel Grafton, Dudley Tarlon and Johanna Jung (UNDP) was presented to the board in the March board meeting.

Cooperation in Europe and the cooperation between UICC members in high income countries by James Wells (UICC) was presented to the board in the March board meeting. James Wells stated that it is important for UICC to find the right partners to discuss and collaborate with, but with limited resources it is especially important to carefully choose the partner and areas of collaboration. UICC is actively cooperating with EU (Beating Cancer Plan) and WHO globally.

It was agreed that NCU and UICC should continue working together. Future collaborative actions and themes are under consideration. Having this goal in mind, the NCU board decided in the December 2021 meeting to contribute to the UICC 2022 World Cancer Congress with € 25.000.

The topic of inequities in childhood cancer care was covered with two presentations in the June board meeting: **Socioeconomic differences in mortality of childhood cancer patients, by Anniina Kyrönlahti (Cancer Registry of Finland); Tackling the inequities in childhood cancer, by Antti Karjalainen (SYLVA Foundation)**

Alcohol as cancer risk factor was covered in the June board meeting by Dr. **Eeva Ollila (The Finnish Cancer Society)** in her presentation **Alcohol and cancer - time to act on the Nordic level**

A road to screening of colorectal cancer in Finland – the role of Finnish Cancer Registry and Cancer Society of Finland, Nea Malila and Tytti Sarkeala (The Finnish Cancer Registry) was presented in the December board meeting. A 12-year-long effort was described to establish colorectal cancer screening program.

NCU Strategic Funds and projects

The Nordic Cancer Union provides funding for strategic projects of high standard within the field of cancer amounting to 250.000 euros annually. The projects funded by the NCU meet strict requirements, with priority given to projects and initiatives that reflect the current general strategy of the NCU and have added Nordic value. Regulations and guidelines were adopted by the board of the Nordic Cancer Union in 2016.

The essential guidelines for an NCU strategic projects are 1. researchers working in two or more Nordic countries must be involved in the project, 2. the projects applied for must have cancer relevance and be uniquely suited to be carried out within the Nordic countries, 3. the effect of collaboration should be synergistic.

In 2021, one of the strategic project *Canceromkostninger i de nordiske lande* was finalized and results were presented in June and December board meetings (see below),

The following strategic projects continued in 2021

- *Tobacco Products, snus and e-cigarettes* 2020 – 2021
- *Socioeconomic inequality and cancer* 2020 – 2021
- *COVID-19 and cancer in the Nordic region* 2021 – 2022

The project *Nordic Summer school in Cancer Epidemiology* was unable to carry out their actions due to coronavirus pandemic and was allowed to reschedule the summer school to 2022.

In the December meeting the NCU board decided to continue its funding to two strategic projects

- *NORDCAN - Cancer statistics for the Nordic countries* 2022 – 2023
- *EFPN – European Fair Pricing Network* 2022 – 2023

Furthermore, one strategic project proposal *NCU Common Actions for the Prevention of Overweight and obesity among Children - NCU-CAPOC* was presented to the NCU board in December by Gitte Laub Hansen (Danish Cancer Society). The board favored supporting this new

project but requested an updated plan with adjusted budget to be discussed and approved in 2022.

Overview of the strategic projects in 2021 and their funding is shown in Table 1. Some of the strategic projects presented their research to NCU board during 2021.

Canceromkostninger i de nordiske lande

The outcomes and key findings of the strategic research project Canceromkostninger i de nordiske lande were presented to the NCU board in the December meeting by Dr. Paulus Torkki (Univ. Helsinki) and Dr. Riikka-Leena Leskelä (the Nordic Healthcare Group).

The results indicated comparable cancer survival rates throughout the Nordic countries, despite the differences in costs between countries. It was agreed that higher transparency of the factors behind the costs would make comparisons more accurate. Furthermore, indirect costs like sick leaves or early retirement due to cancer are difficult to determine precisely but can be significant in total economic burden.

COVID-19 and cancer in the Nordic region

The NCU strategic research project Covid-19 and cancer in the Nordic region (by Giske Ursin and Anna Johansson, the Cancer Registry of Norway) presented their preliminary results in the June board meeting. Furthermore, Janne Pitkääniemi (Cancer Registry of Finland) gave a related talk “The Impact of the Covid19 pandemics on diagnosis of cancer in Finland” in the March board meeting.

Due to pandemic situation, the project actions were rescheduled, and the presented results were very preliminary. Thus, the Covid-project will present again in 2022 with further progress and details.

NORDCAN - Cancer statistics for the Nordic countries

Siri Larønningen presented the present situation of the NORDCAN project: how they have developed the system lately and what will be the next steps in developing this analytical tool and database. The Board was impressed with the quality of the NORDCAN and its utility in supporting Nordic cooperative studies with statistic data.

The NCU Board decided to allocate euro for the strategic research project on NORDCAN - Cancer statistics for the Nordic countries 2022 – 2023.

EFPN – European Fair Pricing Network

NCU entered into a partnership agreement with EFPN – European Fair Pricing Network in November 2020. EFPN, which aims to achieve fair prices for cancer and ensure possibilities for patients to be given better access to new drugs, continued its actions during 2021 despite the difficulties caused by coronavirus pandemic. NCU involved actively in the EFPN Steering Group with Ingrid Stenstadvold Ross, Norwegian Cancer Society as Chair and Jesper Fisker, Danish Cancer Society as member of the Steering Group.

NCU board received a request of extended partnership for 2022-23. As indicated in the accompanying support letter of the request “EFPN is steadily progressing in publishing the first outcomes of their different research initiatives this year. They will be presented during the international HTAi-congress in the spring of 2022, and at the UICC World Cancer Congress in the autumn of 2022”. The application was approved in the December board meeting, thus allowing continued actions towards more reasonably priced cancer medicines in Europe.

Table 1 Strategic projects overview

Project overview - Agreed by the Board of

NCU in December 2021

All amounts in EURO

		Total actual support 2021				
1. Actual support to confirmed projects		Notes				
Canceromkostninger i de nordiske lande	1		59 250			
NORDCAN - Cancer statistics for the Nordic countries.....	2		0			
Tobacco Products, snus and e-cigarettes	3		75 000			
Socioeconomic inequality and cancer	4		75 000			
COVID-19 and cancer in the Nordic region	5		100 000			
Nordic Summer School in Cancer Epidemiology 2021..	6		0			
Total paid support			309 250			
2. Total unpaid support to confirmed projects		Notes	Total planned support 2021 - 2023	Planned in 2021	Planned in 2022	Planned in 2023
Canceromkostninger i de nordiske lande	1		0			
NORDCAN - Cancer statistics for the Nordic countries	2		0			
Tobacco Products, snus and e-cigarettes	3		0			
Socioeconomic inequality and cancer	4		0			
COVID-19 and cancer in the Nordic region	5		100 000		100 000	
Nordic Summer School in Cancer Epidemiology 2021 .	6		80 000		60 000	20 000
Total unpaid support			180 000	0	160 000	20 000

1. Confirmed total of 118 500 € on a Board Meeting in Copenhagen 24 October 2018, paid 59 250 € in 2021

2. Confirmed total of 176 606 € on a Board Meeting in Copenhagen 8 May 2019, paid in 2020 and 2021

3. Confirmed total of 150 000 € on a Board Meeting in Copenhagen 13 November 2019, paid in 2020 and 2021

4. Confirmed total of 150 000 € on a Board Meeting in Copenhagen 13 November 2019, paid in 2020 and 2021

5. Confirmed total of 200 000 € on a Board Meeting held digitally at 10 December 2020, paid 100 000 € in 2021

6. Confirmed total of 80 000 € on a Board Meeting held digitally at 25 September 2020, rescheduled to 2022 and 2023

		Planned in 2021	Planned in 2022	Planned in 2023	Planned in 2024
3. Applications approved in December 2021					
EFPN	1	0	40 000	40 000	0
NORDCAN.....	2	0	55 597	57 194	58 837
Total unapproved applications		0	95 597	97 194	58 837

1. Applied total of 40 000 €, confirmed on a Board Meeting in Helsinki 3 December 2021

2. Applied total of 171 628 €, confirmed on a Board Meeting in Helsinki 3 December 2021

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total confirmed & unpaid (2 and 3)	0	255 597	117 194	58 837

NCU Scientific Committee's recommendations

The annual NCU Scientific Committee (SC) meeting was conducted partly virtual and partly in Helsinki on 1 December 2021. The Nordic Cancer Union (NCU) received 28 grant applications in 2021.

The committee recommends that 12 projects are granted by the NCU Board. A list of the projects for which funding is recommended is presented on pages 3 - 4. The committee's assessment is based on scientific quality, quality of researchers, level of Nordic synergy, and relevance to NCU's strategy.

Table 1 provides an overview of the number of applications received and the level of funding granted from 2018 to 2021.

Table 1: Number of applications and level of funding granted

	2021	2020	2019	2018
Number of applications received	28	30	29	30
Number and ratio (%) of applications funded	12 (43 %)	16 (53 %)	15 (53 %)	16 (53 %)
Total amount of funding applied for (€)	4,910,193	4,821,440	3,441,605	4,432,625
Total funding granted (€)	750,000	750,000	750,000	750,000

Conflict of interest in the evaluation process

The chairman of the SC assigned two main reviewers for each application. Two members had a conflicting interest, and therefore they left the meeting during the evaluation and did not participate in the assessment and scoring of those applications.

Committee's notes about the applications

The number of applications has been low the last four years, 30 or less (2021:28, 2020:30, 2019:29, 2018:30, 2017:42, 2016:34, 2015:41, 2014:35, 2013:42). In general, the committee found the quality of the applications to be good, yet there appeared to be more quality variation than in the previous years.

The SC also raised the issue of whether it has been indicated clearly and unequivocally enough, how many Nordic countries must be involved in an NCU supported research project.

NCU received applications for 8 on-going and 20 new projects. SC recommends 7 on-going and 5 new projects for funding in 2021. Table 1 shows the projects recommended.
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Location of principal investigator

Figure 1 shows the number of applications from each of the Nordic countries in 2021 (determined by the workplace location of the principal investigator). Figure 2 shows the total number of grant applications received by the NCU from 2017 to 2020.

Figure 1: Number of applications (recommended and not recommended) by location in 2021

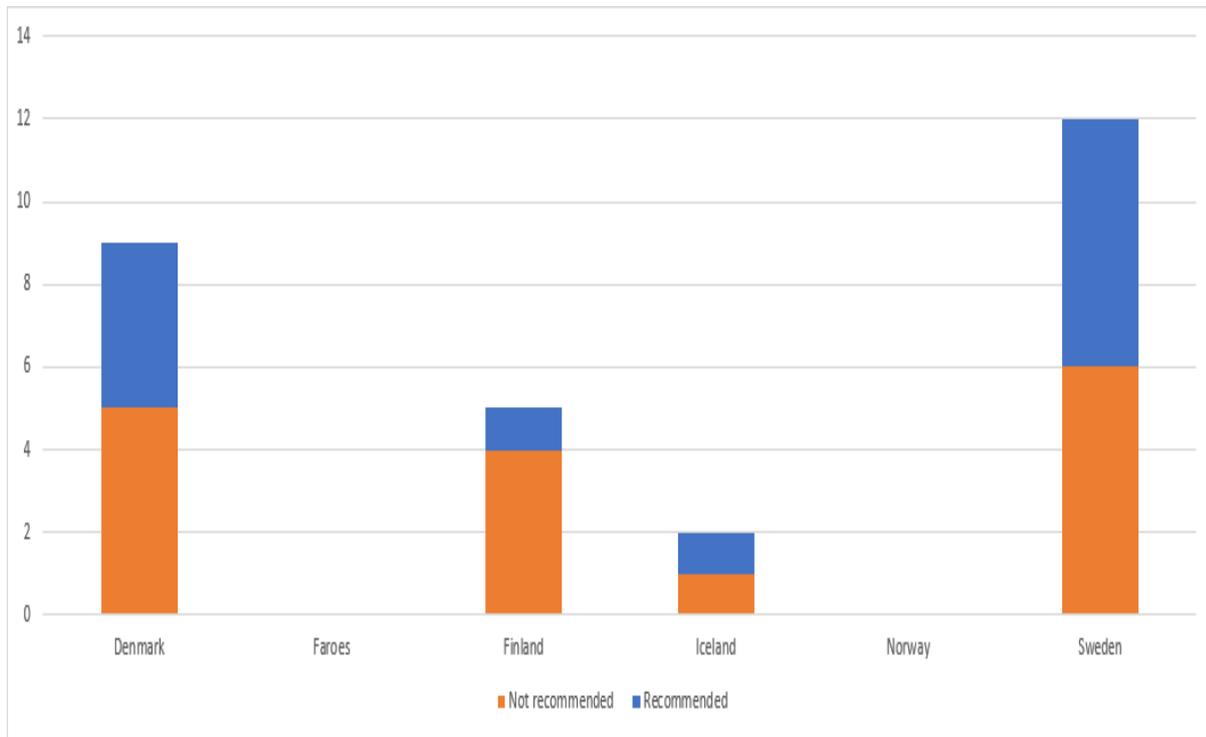


Figure 2: Total number of applications by location from 2018 to 2021

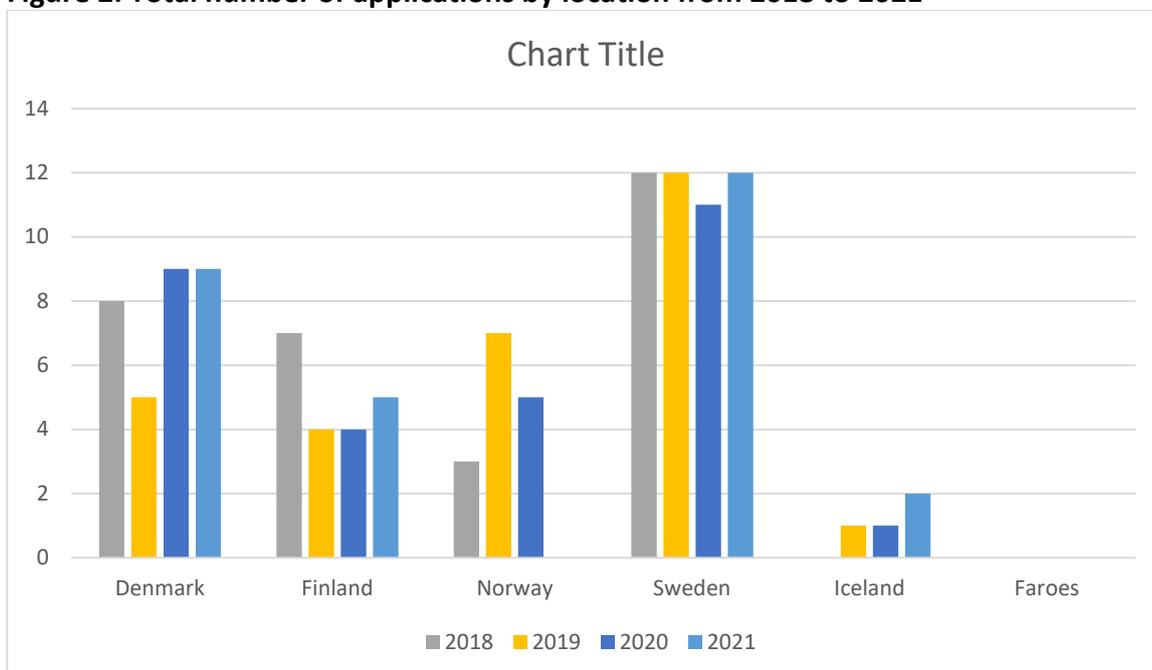


Table 1: Projects recommended to the NCU Board for funding in 2021

Principal Investigator	Project title	Project workplace (principal investigator)	Other participating NCU countries	Applied amount	Recommended amount
Anna Bill-Axelson	SPCG-17: Prostate Cancer Active Surveillance Trigger Trial (PCASTT)	Uppsala University	Norway Denmark Finland	107 000 €	85 000 €
Jesper Lagergren	The risk of oesophageal and gastric cancer after eradication of Helicobacter pylori	Karolinska Institutet	Norway Iceland Finland Denmark	102 360 €	80 000 €
Anja Pinborg	Cancer risk after assisted reproductive technology in children and women - new procedures and challenges	Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen University Hospital	Sweden Norway Finland	122 100 €	80 000 €
Cecilie Hveding Blimark	Treatment and survival in multiple myeloma in the Nordic countries, collaborative registry studies within the Nordic Myeloma Study Group.	Sahlgrenska University Hospital	Denmark Norway Iceland Finland	128 000 €	60 000 €
Sigurður Yngvi Kristinsson	Comorbidity in patients with multiple myeloma	University of Iceland	Denmark Sweden	60 000 €	60 000 €
Anne-Vibeke Lænkholm	Advancing Breast Cancer histopathology towards AI-based Personalised medicine (ABCAP)	Zealand University Hospital	Sweden Finland Denmark	86 067 €	60 000 €
Jiong Li	Maternal autoimmune diseases during pregnancy and childhood cancer in the offspring: a cohort study of 8 million children in five Nordic countries	Aarhus Universitet (AU)	Sweden Finland Norway Iceland	90 000 €	60 000 €
Magnus Tobiasson	Minimal residual disease targeted treatment to improve outcome of transplantation for patients with myelodysplastic syndrome; the Nordic trial NMDSG14B	Karolinska University Hospital	Denmark Norway Finland	60 000 €	60 000 €
Asgeir Store Jakola	Beyond Observed Lesion Diameter (BOLD) glioblastoma surgery: a Nordic randomized controlled trial	Sahlgrenska University Hospital	Norway Denmark Finland	55 000 €	55 000 €
Tarec Christoffer El-Galaly	Real-world outcomes in lymphoma and long-term benefit/risk balance of available therapies - A Nordic, multidisciplinary research program	Aalborg University Hospital	Sweden Norway	61 800 €	50 000 €
Martin Jädersten	PHASE II STUDY OF AZACITIDINE IN COMBINATION WITH LOW DOSE INTENSITY VENETOCLAX IN PATIENTS WITH ACUTE MYELOID LEUKEMIA	Karolinska University Hospital	Denmark Norway Finland	159 000 €	50 000 €
Teemu Murtola	Impact of atorvastatin on prostate cancer progression after initiation of androgen deprivation therapy - phase 3, double-blind randomized clinical trial	Tampere University Hospital	Norway Denmark	350 000 €	50 000 €

The recommendations from the Scientific Committee was approved by the NCU Board 3 December 2021.

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