

NORDIC CANCER UNION • ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Strengthening Nordic cooperation in cancer research, policy and collaboration

NORDIC
**CANCER
UNION**



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Introduction

In 2025, the Nordic Cancer Union (NCU) continued to strengthen Nordic cooperation in cancer research, advocacy and organisational development. This was a year marked by both continuity and progress. NCU supported high-quality Nordic research, strengthened coordination in policy work, and created new opportunities for exchange across the Nordic cancer societies.

The cancer societies of the Nordic region operate in different national contexts, with different structures, priorities and responsibilities. Yet they face many of the same challenges — and many of the same opportunities. NCU exists to bring these organisations together where collaboration adds value: in research, in policy, in organisational learning and in long-term strategic development.

This year's work was guided by four strategic priorities for the period 2024–2026, established by the Norwegian secretariat for its term on behalf of NCU:

- Facilitate and strengthen Nordic research to ensure better patient benefit
- Increase the number of high-quality research applications
- Strengthen and align Nordic advocacy towards the EU and other international actors
- Reinforce learning and exchange across the Nordic cancer societies

During the year, NCU made progress across all four priorities. Research funding remained a central activity, and the number of applications to NCU's annual grant call increased compared to the previous year. Advocacy became more structured and coordinated through cross-border working groups dedicated to tobacco control and clinical trials. Through meetings, conferences and working groups, member organisations continued to learn from one another in ways that strengthened both national work and Nordic cooperation.

About the Nordic Cancer Union

NCU is a collaborative platform for the national cancer societies of the Nordic region. NCU's purpose is to strengthen cooperation in cancer research, prevention, advocacy and organisational development, and to enable the Nordic cancer community to act collectively where this creates added value.

The secretariat, Board chair and administrative responsibility rotate among the member organisations every three years. The Norwegian Cancer Society serves as secretariat for the period 2024–2026.

NCU brings together the national cancer societies in:

- Denmark
- Faroe Islands
- Finland
- Iceland
- Norway
- Sweden

The Nordic cancer societies differ in size, structure and mandate. Some are relatively small, while others are large national organisations with broad portfolios and substantial staffing. They also operate within different health systems, political frameworks and funding models.

At the same time, the Nordic countries have many things in common which are favorable for collaboration, like robust public health care service, distinguished research and innovation environments and excellent health registries, biobanks and population surveys that may serve as a basis for research, innovation and knowledge development, as well as well-established screening programs. The Nordic countries also share strongly regulated data environments based on common values and understanding of security and responsibility of collecting, sharing, and using data.

This creates opportunities for the member organisations to learn from different ways of working, while also identifying common priorities and shared interests. Collectively, the organisations represent considerable Nordic capacity in research funding, patient support, prevention, public engagement and policy development.

Across the network, core activities typically include:

- funding and facilitating cancer research,
- patient support and survivorship services,
- prevention and early detection,
- public awareness and health communication,
- fundraising, and
- advocacy and policy engagement at national and international level.

NCU provides a structure for connecting these efforts across borders and making Nordic collaboration more strategic, more visible and more effective.

Strategic direction

The activities of 2025 were shaped by the strategic objectives of the Norwegian secretariat for 2024–2026. These priorities provided a clear framework for NCU's work and help explain the overall direction of the year.

- **Strengthening Nordic research**
NCU continued to support research collaboration across the region through both open and strategic funding. The aim was not only to fund excellent science, but also to support research that benefits from Nordic cooperation and has clear relevance for patients.
- **Increasing the quality of research applications**
By providing a Nordic funding arena, NCU encourages collaboration across institutions and countries. The continued high level of interest in the annual call shows that the funding scheme remains relevant and attractive to the research community.
- **Building stronger and more coordinated advocacy**
In 2025, NCU took important steps to strengthen policy coordination across the member organisations. The establishment of an Advocacy Task Force marked a clear move towards more structured Nordic cooperation in advocacy, particularly in relation to EU processes and other international policy arenas.
- **Learning from one another**
One of NCU's strengths is its ability to create arenas for exchange. Throughout 2025, member organisations met to share experiences, compare approaches and strengthen Nordic ties across functions and roles. Topics included the impact of artificial intelligence on cancer societies, prevention campaigns and developments in the wider global context.

Governance

NCU is governed by a Board consisting of representatives from the member cancer societies. The Board is responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation and oversees key decisions related to activities, priorities and funding.

Ingrid Stenstadvold Ross, Secretary General of the Norwegian Cancer Society, serves as Chairwoman of the NCU Board.

Board members in 2025



Ingrid Stenstadvold Ross
Kreftforeningen, Secretary General, Norway
Chairwoman of the NCU Board



Halla Þorvaldsdóttir
Krabbameinsfélagið, Managing Director, Iceland



Durita Tausen
Krabbameinsfelagið, Chair, Faroe Islands



Jesper Fisker
Kræftens Bekæmpelse, Chief Executive Officer, Denmark



Juha Pekka Turunen
Syöpäjärjestöt, Secretary General, Finland



Ulrika Årehed Kågstöm
Cancerfonden, Secretary General, Sweden

Board meetings

The NCU Board meets three times a year, with two in-person meetings and one online meeting.

In 2025, the Board met:

- April – Oslo, Norway
- September – Reykjavik, Iceland
- December – online

The September meeting in Reykjavik was held in connection with the annual meeting of the Association of Nordic Cancer Registries (ANCR), providing an opportunity for the Boards of NCU and ANCR to meet for joint discussions and exchange.

The meeting also incorporated a broader European perspective. Representatives from the European Cancer League (ECL) participated in the Board discussions: Ramon Reyes, President of ECL, attended in person, while Wolfgang Fecke, Executive Director of ECL, joined digitally. Their participation brought valuable input and helped strengthen links between Nordic and European work in cancer policy and collaboration.

Across Board meetings, a wide range of topics are discussed, including research, policy work, fundraising, prevention, the global situation, and developments within individual cancer societies across the Nordic region and Europe. A common thread throughout these discussions is the exchange of experience between Board members.

This also includes international perspectives, as members share updates from their involvement in organisations such as Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), European Fair Pricing Network (EFPN) and ECL. These exchanges help ensure that NCU remains informed about developments at the European and global level and supports coordination where relevant.



Representatives from NCU Board and ECL in Reykjavik.

Board meetings thus serve not only as a forum for decision-making, but also for structured exchange of experience across member organisations, including discussions on national priorities, organisational approaches and shared challenges.

Research

Research remains at the core of NCU's mission.

By supporting collaboration across borders, NCU helps strengthen Nordic research environments and encourages projects that make better use of shared strengths, including registries, biobanks, digital health systems and high-quality clinical and population data.

The ambition is clear: to support excellent cancer research that is internationally competitive and relevant for patients.

One of NCU's main instruments for achieving this is the annual open grant call, which supports high-quality cancer research and encourages collaboration across institutions throughout the Nordic region.

Through its research funding, NCU aims to contribute to:

- stronger Nordic research consortia,
- increased quality and competitiveness of applications,
- better use of shared Nordic infrastructure and data, and
- clearer pathways from research to patient benefit.

Annual Grant Call 2025

NCU's annual grant call continued to attract strong interest from the Nordic research community.

In 2025, the call received 37 applications, of which 11 projects were funded. This corresponds to a success rate of 30%. The total amount awarded was EUR 900,000.

The funded projects were selected on the basis of scientific quality, the quality of the researchers involved, Nordic synergy and cancer relevance. Together, they reflect both the breadth and the ambition of Nordic cancer research. According to the NCU Scientific Committee reviewing the proposals, the overall quality of applications continues to improve.

The strong response to the call also demonstrates the continued importance of a Nordic-level funding mechanism, one that enables researchers to work across national borders and build stronger collaborative environments.

Research funding in 2025:

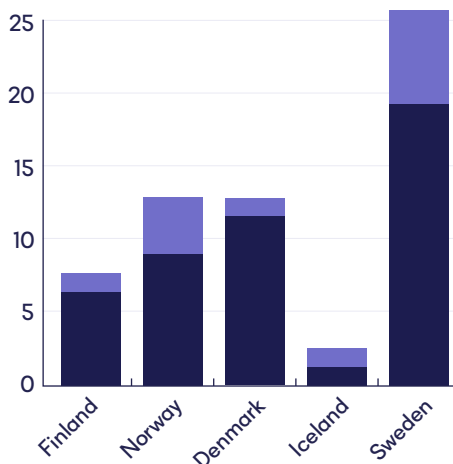
37
applications received

11
projects funded

EUR 900,000
awarded

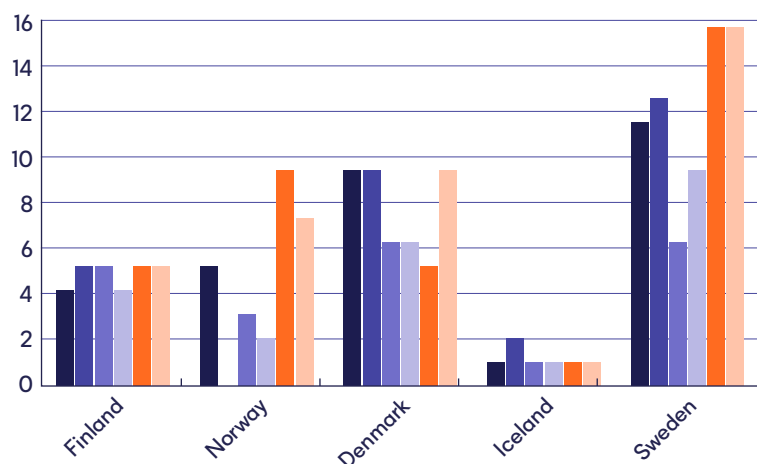
Number of applications by PI location 2025

■ Applied ■ Funded



Applications by location

■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023 ■ 2024 ■ 2025



Funded projects 2025 (shown in alphabetical order based on project title):

Project Title	Project Institute	Participating Countries
BALANCE trial- paravertebral Block AnaLgesia vs. epidural: Assessing Novel Care in Esophagectomy- A multi-centre randomised phase III trial	Uppsala University	Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway
Fecal blood testing versus colonoscopy for post-polypectomy surveillance	Sørlandet sykehus HF	Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark
Improving free light chain testing for the diagnosis and risk stratification of plasma cell malignancies	University of Iceland	Iceland, Denmark, Norway
Improving long-term outcomes in advanced rectal cancer by reducing the risk for local recurrence	Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg	Sweden, Denmark, Norway
Multicenter Randomized Trial of Deferred Cytoreductive Nephrectomy in Synchronous Metastatic Renal Cell Carcinoma THE NORDIC SUN TRIAL	Aarhus University Hospital	Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden
Novel approach to axillary management in patients with breast cancer spread to the armpit: the randomised SENOMAC-ULTRA trial	Karolinska Institutet	Sweden, Denmark, Finland
Optimizing Breast Cancer Screening in the Nordic Countries: A Collaborative Approach to Early Detection, Personalization, and AI Integration	Norwegian Institute of Public Health	Norway, Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden
Phase III trial investigating whether high-dose thoracic radiotherapy improves survival in limited stage small cell lung cancer (DAHRTS)	St. Olavs hospital	Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark
Prediction and prevention of liver cancer – population-based studies combining Nordic register data	Karolinska Institutet	Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Finland
ProBio: An outcome-adaptive and randomised multi-arm biomarker driven trial in patients with metastatic prostate cancer	Karolinska Institutet	Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark
The function of natural killer (NK) cells in leukemia patients	University of Helsinki	Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden

Strategic funding

In addition to the annual open grant call, NCU provides strategic funding to initiatives that address shared Nordic needs and where collaboration creates clear added value. These projects are typically linked to research infrastructure, competence-building or cooperation across countries, and are selected based on their relevance to current Nordic cancer-related priorities.

Strategic funding is intended to support initiatives that strengthen Nordic collaboration, enhance shared infrastructure and build long-term capacity for cancer research, prevention and cancer control. Securing strategic funding requires the submission of an application, which is subject to review by the NCU Board. These strategic funds are allocated to targeted projects for a specified timeframe

In 2025, NCU continued strategic support for NORDCAN, the Nordic Summer School in Cancer Epidemiology and CAPOC. While different in format, these initiatives reflect core elements of NCU's strategy: strengthening Nordic collaboration, making better use of shared Nordic resources, and building capacity that benefits cancer research and cancer control across the region. Over the years, both NORDCAN and the Summer School have repeatedly submitted applications for and been granted strategic funds.

NORDCAN

NORDCAN is a long-standing Nordic platform for comparable data on cancer incidence, mortality, prevalence and survival. Developed through cooperation between the Nordic cancer societies, the Nordic cancer registries and international partners, it has become an important resource not only in the Nordic region, but also internationally.

NCU's support for NORDCAN in 2025 reflects its strategic value as a shared Nordic infrastructure. The platform enables meaningful comparisons across countries, supports research and policy development, and provides a strong basis for further work related to prevention, screening, quality indicators and survival analyses. Continued funding helps ensure that NORDCAN remains a robust and forward-looking flagship for Nordic cancer statistics.

In 2025, NCU disbursed strategic funding to NORDCAN for the Prevent 2.0 project (160,000 euro) and NORDCAN statistics (54,850 euro).



The CAPOC-network group gathered in Reykjavik for their annual in-person meeting in June 2025.

Nordic Summer School

The Nordic Summer School is a unique training course in cancer epidemiology built around the use of Nordic registry data. The course combines theoretical teaching with practical work on real data and gives participants hands-on experience with methods, collaboration and scientific communication.

NCU's support for the Summer School reflects its strategic importance for long-term capacity-building in Nordic cancer research. By attracting and training early-career researchers — including students before the start of a PhD — the course strengthens recruitment into cancer epidemiology, builds Nordic research networks, and helps ensure that the exceptional Nordic registry resources are used to their full potential.

In 2025, NCU disbursed EUR 26,147.50 in strategic funding to the Nordic Summer School.

CAPOC

In 2025, the CAPOC network (Common actions for the prevention of overweight and obesity among

children in the Nordic countries) focused primarily on disseminating the results from its first three-year collaboration project. This work included an umbrella review of the effects of national and global prevention policies, a policy brief outlining the Nordic cancer societies' recommendations for preventing overweight and obesity among children, and a survey assessing public support for these policy recommendations across the Nordic countries.

During 2025, CAPOC presented its results at Nordic and international arenas, held its annual meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, and continued work on publications and updates to the scientific evidence base. The network also facilitated ongoing exchange of experience on key prevention topics across the Nordic countries.

In 2025, NCU disbursed EUR 56,214.00 in strategic funding to CAPOC.

Advocacy and international engagement

The NCU Advocacy Task Force has become a key driver of NCU's policy and advocacy work.

Members in 2025

- Jon Kirknes
The Norwegian Cancer Society (Chair)
- Sara Johansson
The Swedish Cancer Society
- Thomas Krogh
Kræftens Bekæmpelse, Denmark
- Sarianne Hartonen
Cancer Society of Finland
- Vigdís Guðmundsdóttir
Icelandic Cancer Society

The Task Force brings together policy and advocacy expertise from across the member organisations and provides a structured framework for joint discussion, prioritisation and coordination. Through in-person and digital meetings, it has helped ensure progress, alignment of priorities and closer collaboration.

The NCU Board is responsible for decisions and strategic priorities, while the Advocacy Task Force supports this work by preparing proposals, coordinating activities and following up on agreed priorities.

The Task Force works through thematic working groups based on priorities identified by the Board and, where relevant, by the Task Force. These groups report to the Task Force, which reports to the Board.

In 2025, NCU further strengthened its work in advocacy and European policy engagement, with particular emphasis on tobacco control and clinical trials. This reflects a growing need for Nordic coordination in a landscape where cancer policy is increasingly shaped at both national and European levels.

The aim is to identify shared interests, improve coordination, and make Nordic collaboration more strategic and effective.

Tobacco control

Tobacco control remained a key area for Nordic advocacy in 2025.

Tobacco control is an area where Nordic cooperation offers clear value, and Sweden leads NCU's working group in this field. The Nordic countries face many of the same public health challenges, and there is clear benefit in sharing knowledge, policy approaches and advocacy strategies across borders.

In 2025, the working group consisted of:

- Astrid Knudsen, Steffen Larsen, Danish Cancer Society
- Sarianne Hartonen, Katri Saarela, Finnish Cancer Society
- Vigdís Guðmundsdóttir, Icelandic Cancer Society
- Maxime Compaore, Kristin Byrkje, Marianne Hammer, Norwegian Cancer Society
- Lisa Klefbom, Sara Jakupovic, Swedish Cancer Society

The working group has finalised a comprehensive policy paper on tobacco control, outlining key recommendations from the Nordic Cancer Union. The paper highlights priority actions to reduce tobacco use and strengthen preventive measures across the Nordic region, reinforcing NCU's commitment to cancer prevention through evidence-based advocacy. The paper formed the basis for a joint letter sent to the European Commission in early 2026.



Clinical trials

Clinical trials became an increasingly important topic

during the second half of 2025 and are expected to be a key focus area in 2026.

At the NCU Board meeting in September 2025, it was decided that clinical trials should be developed as a strategic priority. Norway was given responsibility for gathering representatives from the other Nordic countries and coordinating a process to identify relevant areas for joint work.

All NCU member countries were invited to participate in this effort. During autumn 2025, several digital meetings were held between representatives from Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The Clinical trials working group consist of:

- Ann Rita Halvorsen (Chair), Wenche Rasch, Norwegian Cancer Society
- Sara Jakupovic, Johan Gomez de la Torre, Swedish Cancer Society
- Ulrik Lassen, Danish Cancer Society

The discussions focused on a central question: *how can the Nordic countries make better use of their shared strengths?*

These strengths include:

- strong healthcare and research infrastructure,
- highly digitalised health systems,
- national registries and biobanks,
- extensive genomic data, and
- high levels of public trust.

The working group, together with feedback from the Board, will continue to develop this work on clinical trials in the Nordic countries and internationally.

National cancer strategies

National cancer strategies were also an important point of reference for NCU's advocacy work in 2025. Across the Nordic countries, several strategies have recently been adopted or updated, shaping national priorities and influencing the broader policy landscape.

Throughout the year, NCU facilitated exchange of experience related to these processes, including discussions on how cancer strategies are developed and implemented, how priorities are defined, how progress is monitored, and what challenges arise in practice. Looking ahead, it will be particularly important for the NCU Board to share experiences on the



Representatives from Nordic cancer helplines convened in Iceland to share experiences, discuss common challenges, and explore new opportunities for service development.

implementation of national cancer strategies across the Nordic countries.

This exchange supports mutual learning across the member organisations and provides valuable input to NCU's ongoing advocacy work. It also helps identify where Nordic cooperation can add value, both in strengthening national strategies and in aligning efforts across the region.

Learning and exchange across the Nordic cancer societies

An important aspect of NCU's work, and for the member organisations, is to create opportunities for learning and exchange across the Nordic cancer societies.

In 2025, this included meetings among the CEOs of the member organisations, as well as exchanges between advisers and professional staff. These meetings provide a practical forum for sharing experience, discussing common challenges and learning from different ways of organising work across the Nordic countries.

Member organisations engage in bilateral exchanges on specific topics such as research administration, fund-

raising, advocacy and cancer care. In addition, several organisations at times come together in broader group settings to share experiences and explore common challenges. One example of this type of collaboration is the exchange between the Nordic cancer helplines.

Nordic Cancer Helplines Gathered in Iceland for Experience Sharing

In 2025, representatives from the Nordic cancer helplines met in Iceland to share experiences and discuss common challenges. The meeting focused on how to reach different groups in the population and how services can be further developed to meet evolving needs. Several organisations presented initiatives aimed at broadening their reach, providing useful input and inspiration for continued collaboration.

During the meeting, the Icelandic Cancer Registry also presented ongoing research on health-related quality of life among cancer patients. The study compares patient-reported outcomes with those of the general population and aims to strengthen knowledge on how cancer affects quality of life, with relevance for follow-up and support services.

Looking ahead

In the landscape of cancer research, policy and care, Nordic cooperation remains highly relevant.

The challenges are complex, but the Nordic countries also have significant strengths: strong institutions,

solid public trust, high-quality data, and organisations with long experience in cancer control and advocacy. When these strengths are connected, they create opportunities that individual organisations cannot achieve alone.

The work carried out in 2025 provides a strong foundation for the years ahead.

NCU will continue to build on this through:

- continued support for high-quality Nordic cancer research,
- stronger and more coordinated advocacy,
- further development of work on tobacco control and clinical trials, and
- continued learning and exchange across the member organisations.

From 2027, Cancerfonden in Sweden will assume responsibility for the NCU secretariat.

This marks an important transition, but also reflects an essential feature of NCU: shared Nordic responsibility. The Norwegian secretariat will continue to develop and consolidate key initiatives during the remainder of its term, helping ensure a strong handover and a solid basis for the next phase of NCU's work.

NCU enters that next phase with a clear purpose – to turn Nordic cooperation into practical value for research, policy, organisations and, ultimately, people affected by cancer.

