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Open letter to the Task Force Secretariat

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Dear Chair

### Re. Statement of Intent

I am writing on behalf of Breast Cancer UK and our supporters, to express our concerns over a number of perceived gaps in the recently published Cancer Task Force's 'Statement of Intent'. We are seeking reassurance that the final Strategy will not ignore the role of environmental pollutants in cancer causation, or the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the aetiology of cancer.

We welcome the Task Force's commitment to ensure that prevention initiatives "feature prominently in the next cancer strategy". We are, however, concerned that those outlined in the Statement of Intent fall short of the "high level ambitions" stated. The Statement of Intent appears to limit prevention strategies to lifestyle interventions, but makes no mention of the need to tackle the broader environmental and exogenous causes of cancer, such as exposure to harmful chemicals including those that mimic or interfere with the human hormone system. We are, of course, supportive of lifestyle intervention strategies, but do not believe this is the only way cancers can be prevented.

As stated in our original submission, there is growing global concern<sup>1</sup> that exposure to harmful chemicals and particularly endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) could be contributing to an increased risk of many diseases including cancers. An article in Nature published on April 1st called for a "change in the cancer conversation" and criticised the "timid policy on environmental causation" and the low level of funding put towards environmental health research<sup>2</sup>. We feel there is a need for a change in tack and a fresh approach to cancer prevention initiatives; unfortunately this is not reflected in the Statement of Intent.

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*1 E.g. see UNEP/WHO (2013). State of the science of endocrine disrupting chemicals 2012 <http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/Portals/9/EDC/StateOfEDCscience.pdf> and European Environment Agency (2012). The Weybridge+15 (1996–2011) Report: The impacts of endocrine disrupters on wildlife, people and their environments <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/the-impacts-of-endocrine-disrupters> and Report of the Interagency Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Coordinating Committee (IBCERCC) (2013). 'Breast Cancer and the Environment Prioritising Prevention Prioritising Breast Cancer'. [http://www.niehs.nih.gov/about/assets/docs/ibcercc\\_full\\_508.pdf](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/about/assets/docs/ibcercc_full_508.pdf) and also 2013 Berlaymont Declaration on Endocrine Disruptors found at [http://www.ipcp.ch/Berlaymont\\_August\\_7.pdf](http://www.ipcp.ch/Berlaymont_August_7.pdf) (Accessed September 2013)  
2 [http://www.nature.com/polopoly\\_fs/1.17236!/menu/main/topColumns/topLeftColumn/pdf/520007a.pdf](http://www.nature.com/polopoly_fs/1.17236!/menu/main/topColumns/topLeftColumn/pdf/520007a.pdf) (accessed 07/04/2-15)*

The Statement of Intent says population level interventions will “ensure fewer people expose themselves to other carcinogens” but we believe the final strategy must go further: it must outline preventative measures which actively reduce the public’s exposure to all harmful chemicals. It should look beyond lifestyle factors such as smoking, diet, alcohol, exercise and UV exposure and specifically include known and suspected carcinogens and EDCs, which have also been linked to an increase risk of reproductive cancers.

Finally, we would like to express our concern at the lack of any mention of the importance of research funding into prevention and the aetiology of cancer. We hope this is also remedied in the final published strategy.

The Cancer Task Force has a unique opportunity to adopt a fresh approach to cancer prevention and to “change the cancer conversation”. We hope that it’s not too late to ensure that the final strategy to be published in the summer does this.

Yours sincerely

Lynn Ladbrook  
Chief Executive