Belgium – Engaging the large public in ELSI in genomics – the societal debate

iPAAC
INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP
FOR ACTION AGAINST CANCER

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TYPE STATUS	Fully implemented initiative and ongoing since 2019	LAST UPDATE	February 2020

BELGIUM ● NATIONAL
Diagnostic & Treatment

OBJECTIVE & RATIONALE

Because genomics is becoming everybody's business, due to personalized medicine and the need for massive data sharing, there is a need to raise the public awareness on the ELSI of genomics and to make their voices heard.

KEY COMPONENTS / STEPS

- Creation of an interactive website that provides various tools (video, test, discussion forum) to launch the debate among the population.
- Engaging high schools to participate in the online debate through an educational package that teachers can use in class.
- Asking the help of press and audio-visual media to inform the public about this initiative.
- Organization of an essay contest for high school students who participate on a voluntary basis.
- Organization of a Symposium in March 2020 where Sciensano will present the qualitative analysis results of the online debate and the citizen forum to interested policymakers, experts and other stakeholders.

MAIN IMPACTS / ADDED VALUE

- More than one thousand Belgian citizens, including young generations, reflected and debated on the ELSI surrounding the use of genomic information, which raised the public awareness. Sciensano identified the values and principles underlying the public opinion and formulated recommendations for policymakers and experts on this basis.

LESSONS LEARNED

- To engage the public, it is important to vulgarize the topic as much as possible and to provide interactive tools, such as a website, online test and discussion platform.
- Plan sufficient communication budget to inform the public about your initiative through traditional and social media.

CONTACT

Sciensano
Cancer Center
www.e-cancer.be

REFERENCES & DOCUMENTATION

- Website of the online debate
- https://www.e-cancer.be/nl/projects/dna-debat
- https://www.sciensano.be/en/press-corner/dna-debate-give-your-opinion