

DELIVERABLE D4.3

# INFORMATION SESSIONS REPORT



## SPACE

Social Prescribing And Civic Engagement

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## 1. Project information

**WP4 duration:** 01/12/2024 - 30/11/2027: 36 Months

**Deliverable:** D4.3 Information Sessions Report (EN)

**Call:** ERASMUS-EDU-2024-PCOOP-ENGO - Partnerships for Cooperation - Cooperation Partnerships in the field of Education and Training submitted by European NGOs

**Space – Social Prescribing and Civic Engagement is an Erasmus+ funded project** that aims to bring together social prescribing and volunteering to create an environment and approach that supports the health and well-being of people with health and rehabilitation needs. The project will address the Education and Training needs of health, social care, and rehabilitation professionals, as well as NGO/Civil Society leaders and policymakers, making a direct impact on the EU Cancer Mission and contributing to national cancer plans.

The main goal of the project is to work transnationally and across sectors to promote dialogue, knowledge exchange and common understanding of Social Prescribing, and to address common education and training needs to increase quality in the work, activities and practices of organisations and institutions involved in social prescribing, opening up to new actors not naturally included to enable transformation and change, leading to improvements and new approaches at different practice and policy levels especially in the framework of the EU Cancer Mission.

The project is led by the **Centre for European Volunteering** (EU Level) in cooperation with partners such as **European Platform for Rehabilitation** (EU level), **Volunteer Ireland** (Ireland), **World Organisation of Family Doctors** (EU level), **Heaton Mersey Village Conservation Group** (UK), **Hellenic Cancer Federation** (Greece), **Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector** (Malta), and **Fundacio Institut Universitari per a la Recerca a L'atencio Primaria de Salut Jordi Gol I Gurina** (Spain).

You can find more information on the SPACE project website at this link: <https://www.space-eu.eu/>



## 2. Introduction

This report presents the results of a series of information sessions, which were designed as a key outreach activity of the SPACE project. The primary goal of these sessions was to promote the project among non-partner stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in social prescribing. These sessions served as an entry point to present the project's vision, highlight its potential impact, and foster dialogue with a broader community of actors who could benefit from, contribute to, or replicate its approaches. The sessions had four main objectives:

- **Raise awareness:** Introduce non-partner stakeholders to the goals, activities, and expected outcomes of the SPACE project.
- **Encourage engagement:** Inspire external stakeholders who will enhance the sustainability of the project by supporting, adopting, or replicating the social prescribing model that SPACE will develop, particularly the role of volunteering and gardening as innovative health interventions.
- **Facilitate networking:** Strengthen connections between project partners and new stakeholders, paving the way for future collaborations and community-driven initiatives.
- **Gather insights and feedback:** Collect input, ideas, and reflections from diverse perspectives to inform the project's activities and outputs so that it addresses real needs, challenges, opportunities and expectations.

The target audience for these sessions included healthcare professionals, voluntary organisations, cancer patient associations, policymakers, community groups, researchers, and academics. The engagement of such a varied audience aimed to capture the complexity and plethora of perspectives surrounding social prescribing practices. In terms of delivery, partners were given flexibility to choose the format and setting that best matched their local contexts and audiences. Sessions could be organised online or in-person, either as stand-alone events or as part of broader activities, given that these were not funded under another EU initiative. This adaptability enabled each partner to reach stakeholders most effectively, aligning with the project's overall goals for engagement, dissemination and exploitation.

## 2. Descriptive characteristics of information sessions

Overall, **eight information sessions** were conducted between March and August 2025, with a total of 139 participants in attendance. Regarding the geographical coverage, one session took place in Brussels (P1), one in Malta (P7), one in Greece (P5), one in Ireland (P2), one in Spain (P8), one in the UK (P4), while two had attendees from multiple countries (P3, P6). The target audience included students from the University's Student Union Health Society (P1), cancer patients (P5), healthcare professionals (P2, P4, P6, P7, P8), community members (P2, P7), and members of voluntary organisations (P2, P7, P8). Regarding the format of the sessions, three were held online and five were in-person, with one session taking place in a community garden (P2), one in a hospital (P4), two at a partner's premises (P1), and one in a conference venue (P5). All descriptive characteristics of the information sessions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of the information sessions

Partner	Date	Format	Venue (Country)	N of participants	Target audience
<b>(P1)</b> Centre for European Volunteering (CEV)	10 April 2025	In person/stand-alone	CEV office (Brussels)	9	Students of social/political sciences
<b>(P2)</b> Volunteering Ireland (VI)	17 July 2025	In person/stand-alone	Mud Island Community Garden, Newcomen Court (Ireland)	7	Community members, academic healthcare professionals, and voluntary organisation members
<b>(P3)</b> World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA)	22 July 2025	Online/stand-alone	N/A	29	Healthcare professionals, volunteers and community members
<b>(P4)</b> Heaton Mersey Conservation Group CIC (HMCVG-CIC)	13 August 2025	In person/stand-alone	Education Suite Broadgreen Hospital (UK)	10	Healthcare professionals
<b>(P5)</b> Hellenic Cancer Federation (ELLOK)	1 July 2025	In person/Presented at the “2nd Synergies Forum on Cancer” organised by ELLOK	Wyndham Hotel, Athens (Greece)	32	Cancer patients
<b>(P6)</b> European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)	18 March 2025	Online/Presented during EPR General Assembly	N/A	27	Service-providers, rehabilitation, healthcare, social care and VET professionals
<b>(P7)</b> Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS)	26 June 2025	Online/ Delivered together with Mental Health First Aid training	N/A (Malta)	14	Healthcare professionals, community members, and voluntary organisation members
<b>(P8)</b> Fundacio Institut Universitari per a la Recerca a L’atencio Primaria de Salut Jordi Gol I Gurina (IDIAP)	13 May 2025	In person/stand-alone	IDIAP Jordi Gol office (Spain)	11	Health care professionals and associations of volunteers

### 3. Summary of participants' feedback

Across all sessions, participants demonstrated a strong interest in the SPACE project and its relevance to both healthcare and community contexts, recognising the opportunity that green prescribing presents. The feedback collected by each stakeholder group is briefly reported below.

**Students** were enthusiastic about the project's potential to inform more holistic models of care and their alignment with existing frameworks. They engaged critically with the research methodology and raised important questions about the feasibility of scaling such approaches within strained public healthcare systems. They also noted that the outcomes of the research conducted under the SPACE project may serve as a valuable case study for further healthcare research, focusing on the integration of social and environmental factors into oncological care. Students' feedback also highlighted the need for further engagement with other student bodies and academic networks to sustain the SPACE project.

**Healthcare professionals** also reacted positively, particularly in relation to "green prescribing" approaches that utilise voluntarism, community and natural spaces, although a general lack of knowledge about social prescribing was detected. They expressed willingness to integrate these practices into restructured services, yet highlighted practical barriers, such as weak referral pathways between primary and secondary care and the lack of comprehensive mapping of community resources. Moreover, there was agreement that social prescribing should go beyond the biomedical model and incorporate psychosocial dimensions of health. Notably, oncologists remained the least-engaged stakeholder group, citing uncertainty about referral criteria and the need for dedicated guidance on integration to healthcare.

**Researchers** recognised the importance of exploring and producing evidence on how nature can impact the experience of individuals with cancer, as well as their caregivers and family members, in alleviating the psychosocial burden and fostering social inclusion and connection. They also showed particular interest in the participatory approach of the SPACE project with the active involvement of all stakeholders and discussed the benefits that this could bring in real-world implementation.

**Community and voluntary sector participants**, including organisations working with vulnerable groups, recognised the value of social prescribing as a tool for psychosocial support and empowerment. They shared real examples where voluntarism not only supported individual well-being but also fostered leadership and inclusion within communities. They highlighted that the shift from passive recipient to active contributor reflects how civic participation can foster a renewed sense of agency, purpose, and social connectedness. They emphasised that social prescribing operates as a recommended intervention model wherein individuals retain complete autonomy in deciding whether to engage with the proposed services or approaches. However, they also underlined significant challenges, including limited resources, difficulties in maintaining consistent participation, a lack of a clear structure and protocols defining roles and functions, and the need for external professional support to safeguard participants and manage more complex needs.

**Cancer patients** expressed interest in the role of social prescribing in supporting their well-being. They particularly welcomed the idea of incorporating green and blue prescribing as complementary interventions, recognising their potential to improve both mental and physical health. At the same time, they valued the emphasis on community connection and social inclusion. They also stressed the need for programs to remain flexible, allowing participants to work at their own pace, and emphasised the importance of having trained facilitators or volunteer managers present to create a

safe and supportive environment. Finally, patients underlined the importance of clear communication. They want to understand how social prescribing activities fit into their broader care pathway, and what tangible benefits to expect.

Overall, the following cross-cutting themes emerged from the feedback:

- Stakeholders across all groups welcomed the SPACE project as timely and relevant, recognising its potential to improve wellbeing through non-clinical, community- and voluntary-based interventions.
- Concerns about feasibility and sustainability: Many participants questioned how such approaches could be scaled within current health systems. Sustainability was also raised in terms of the voluntary organisations' capacity to take on additional responsibilities.
- The role of support structures: The presence of trained professionals or link workers was consistently identified as essential for ensuring that patient-volunteers are adequately supported without overburdening existing community structures.
- Empowerment through civic engagement: Stakeholders emphasised that social prescribing is not only about health outcomes but also about fostering agency, purpose, and inclusion. Several examples showed how initial beneficiaries can transition into active contributors.
- Need for effective outreach and communication: Feedback highlighted that even well-designed initiatives risk low participation without targeted communication strategies and awareness-building.

#### 4. Lessons learned for SPACE

The information sessions confirmed that the SPACE project resonates with a broad range of stakeholders and holds promise as a model for integrating health, social, and community dimensions of care. However, feedback also points to several areas requiring attention:

- Ensuring evidence-based approach and methodological rigour to strengthen the credibility of project outcomes.
- Exploring pathways for scalability that consider national healthcare contexts and capacities.
- Building stronger partnerships between healthcare providers and community organisations to bridge referral gaps.
- Providing structural and professional support to voluntary groups, ensuring that participation is safe, sustainable, and empowering.
- Investing in communication and outreach strategies that highlight the value of social prescribing to diverse audiences.

Conclusively, the SPACE project's information days have provided valuable insights into both opportunities and challenges associated with social prescribing. Stakeholders expressed apparent enthusiasm for the project, along with realistic concerns about its practical implementation. By considering the feedback gathered, the project is well-positioned to refine its approaches, strengthen its partnerships, and ensure that its models of care are practical, effective and sustainable.

## 5. Photos from the information sessions

