



CLOSING THE GAP

Advancing Equitable Access & Innovation in HER2-Positive Breast Cancer Care in Germany

INTRODUCTION: The Need for Action

HER2-positive breast cancer, one of the most aggressive subtypes, affects 15–20% of all breast cancer patients. Thanks to targeted therapies, survival rates have significantly improved. But access to these life-saving treatments is not a given for all patients in Germany. Despite having one of the most advanced healthcare systems in Europe, disparities in early detection, treatment availability, and specialized care persist.

WHY SHOULD A PATIENT'S CHANCE OF SURVIVAL DEPEND ON WHERE THEY LIVE?

Germany is classified as "Leading - Highly Developed" in the Maturity Level Framework for Cancer Care, excelling in infrastructure, treatment access, research, early detection, biomarker utilization, and palliative care.

If Germany has world-class infrastructure, why do patients in rural areas still struggle to reach certified breast cancer centers?
If reimbursement policies ensure access to HER2 therapies, why do treatment variations persist between hospitals?

"Being a leader comes with responsibility."

These gaps must be addressed to ensure that **all HER2-positive breast cancer patients, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, receive timely, high-quality care.**

KEY CHALLENGES AND POLICY GAPS

1. Unequal Access to Certified Breast Cancer Centers

Fact:

- Patients treated in DKG-certified centers have 23% lower mortality.
- Yes, Germany has over 200 certified breast centers—but... many rural patients still struggle to reach them, leading to delayed diagnoses and suboptimal treatment.

Specialist services, including genetic counseling and clinical trial enrollment, are disproportionately available in urban areas, reinforcing regional disparities.



KEY CHALLENGES AND POLICY GAPS

2. Regional Variability in Biomarker Testing & Precision Medicine

Fact: HER2, ER, PR, and BRCA testing are mandatory in guidelines, yet implementation is inconsistent across hospitals.

- Yes, biomarker testing is widely available—but... access to advanced molecular diagnostics like Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) remains uneven.

Patients in non-specialist hospitals face longer waiting times for biomarker-driven treatments, limiting personalized care options

3. Disparities in the Uptake of New HER2 Therapies

Fact: The AMNOG process ensures early access to EMA-approved therapies, but hospital adoption rates vary significantly.

- Yes, cutting-edge HER2 therapies exist—but... financial constraints at smaller hospitals mean some patients miss out on the latest treatments..

Dual HER2 blockade (trastuzumab + pertuzumab)—a proven life-extending treatment—is not prescribed uniformly across Germany.

4. Screening & Early Detection Gaps

Fact: Germany's national screening program is fully reimbursed, yet only ~50% of eligible women participate—far below the 90% EU target.

- Yes, screening is available—but... participation remains low, especially among lower-income, rural, and immigrant populations.

The screening program excludes women under 50, even though younger patients with aggressive tumors could benefit from early detection.

5. Palliative Care Disparities for Advanced HER2-Positive Cases

Fact: Germany integrates palliative care into its healthcare system, yet regional inconsistencies persist.

- Yes, systemic therapies are improving survival—but... structured home-based palliative care is still not universally available.

Psychosocial support services remain underfunded, leaving many patients without necessary emotional and mental health care.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A Call for Action

Germany's high maturity level in cancer care is an achievement—but it is not enough. Being "highly developed" should mean leaving no patient behind. To bridge these gaps, the following targeted policies are essential:

1. Expand Access to Certified Breast Cancer Centers

- **Increase funding for regional cancer hubs** to reduce geographic disparities.
- **Develop tele-oncology programs** to provide remote consultations and second opinions for underserved areas.
- **Incentivize oncologists to work in rural regions**, offering financial rewards for specialists in high-need locations

2. Ensure Nationwide Access to Precision Medicine & Biomarker Testing

- **Mandate universal reimbursement for Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS)** for eligible patients.
- **Establish national molecular testing centers**, ensuring uniform access across all hospitals.
- **Strengthen clinical trial participation**, expanding access for patients in non-urban settings.

3. Standardize Adoption of New HER2-Targeted Therapies

- **Monitor and enforce guideline adherence** to ensure all patients receive the most effective therapies.
- **Expand funding for specialist training**, ensuring oncologists in all settings stay updated on the latest treatments.
- **Address financial barriers** that limit smaller hospitals from offering the full range of HER2-targeted therapies.

4. Improve Screening Participation & Early Detection

- **Launch targeted awareness campaigns**, focusing on low-participation groups.
- **Enhance mobile screening units & outreach programs** to reach rural and underserved communities.
- **Expand high-risk screening options**, considering genetic predisposition and early-onset cases.

5. Strengthen Palliative Care Integration

- **Ensure standardized access to palliative services**, regardless of region.
- **Expand home-based palliative care programs**, reducing reliance on hospitals.
- **Increase investment in psychosocial support**, ensuring cancer patients receive holistic care.



CONCLUSION

A Future of Equitable Breast Cancer Care

Germany's oncology framework is strong, but **strength is measured by inclusivity**. If rural patients continue to face treatment delays and disparities in HER2-positive breast cancer care, can Germany truly claim to be a leader?

- Will the country take action to close these gaps—or will geographic and economic differences continue to dictate patient outcomes?
- How can policymakers ensure that every patient — regardless of location — receives the highest quality care available?

By implementing these targeted policy recommendations, Germany can truly bridge existing gaps and reinforce its position as a global leader in HER2-positive breast cancer care. The time for action is now.