

WECAN Academy 2026

Event Report



WECAN
Foundation

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ABOUT THE EVENT

100 Participants

34 Countries

23 Sessions

The WECAN Academy 2026 brought together 100 participants and speakers from 34 countries from Europe and beyond for a transformative in-person experience in Gdansk, Poland. Participants engaged in one of two tailored tracks:

- **WECAN SmartStart** – for emerging patient advocates
- **WECAN MasterClass** – for experienced leaders in patient advocacy

Aligned with our mission and past editions, the Academy focused on building essential knowledge, advocacy skills, and community to empower participants to create meaningful change in healthcare systems and policy.



24-28th June 2026



Gdansk

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS - DAY BY DAY

Day 1 – Building the Foundations

The Academy opened with a warm welcome from WECAN Chair **Alex Filicevas**, followed by a moving personal story shared by advocate **Lidia Zelinska** from Poland.

SmartStart participants explored foundational topics, including:

- **Lobby Pyramid**
- **Basics of Drug Development, EBA & Inequities**
- **Ethics in Advocacy**

These sessions laid the groundwork for more in-depth discussions in the following days. The six interactive sessions of the day were attended by 32 Smart Start participants from 21 countries.

The room was also filled of 31 research and advocacy posters where the participants presented their best recent projects to drive the knowledge sharing between different communities.

Day 2 – Sustainability and Governance, AI and Research

During the joint sessions for Smart Start and Master Class levels participants experienced a deeper dive into **legal and financial sustainability** for patient organizations, learned the best practices for a **good NGO governance**, discussed the use of **AI technologies in patient advocacy** as well as debated around key **Policy stakeholders on national and international levels**, got the ideas of how to better get involved into **Research agenda** and how to **engage and manage volunteers**.

The day helped participants to be fully equipped with both strategic and practical tools for their work and gave them an overview of **Health Economics basics**.



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Day 3 – Policy, Scientific Data and Communication

The day focused on advanced topics keeping participants busy and active while learning how to read and interpret scientific papers, discuss the challenges of ensuring patient centricity in clinical trials, brainstormed about the ideas and best practices of communications and experienced the latest takes on JCA and regulatory policy as well as how to engage key stakeholders.

This content deepened participants' understanding of the systemic and regulatory landscape shaping cancer advocacy.

Day 4 – MasterClass Spotlight

MasterClass participants engaged in advanced discussions on Advanced Evidence-Based Advocacy and Health Inequities and Systemic Barriers. They also worked on a mapping access exercise in Europe.

The day fostered high-level dialogue and peer learning among seasoned advocates.

SESSIONS OVERVIEW

21 obligatory sessions

2 optional sessions

22 speakers

Average rating of the Academy by participants is **5.73 out of 6** possible while the content of the Academy was rated at **5.64**.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE BEYOND THE EVENT



WECAN remains committed to expanding access to training for both new and experienced advocates.



The WECAN Academy continues to serve as a flagship annual event, reinforcing our commitment to long-term capacity building.



Academy resources, recordings, and practical tools will continue to be shared, enabling advocates to apply and disseminate knowledge across Europe.





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FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Among key takeaways participants mentioned the importance of **learning, networking and collaboration**, in their own words:

“Patient advocacy is most effective when organizations across Europe collaborate, share experiences, and learn from one another. It becomes even more powerful when compelling patient stories are complemented by high-quality evidence and data”.

“Importance of using good evidence; Importance of collaboration and learning from others to glean best practices; Importance of getting together in person regularly to meet and exchange”.

“The power of patient advocacy starts with patient voices. One of the most valuable lessons for me was understanding how important it is for patients and families to be actively involved in healthcare decision-making. Real change happens when patient organizations are not only beneficiaries of policies but also partners in shaping them. Collaboration creates stronger impact than working alone. Meeting advocates from different countries showed me that many of our challenges are shared, regardless of where we come from. By exchanging experiences, good practices, and lessons learned, we can accelerate progress and create more effective solutions for patients and families. Advocacy requires both passion and strategy. WECAN Academy reinforced the importance of combining personal commitment with evidence-based advocacy, effective communication, stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning. Passion opens doors, but strategy helps achieve sustainable change.”

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

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“Different angles on clinical studies depending on who is reading them; how drugs get approved, reimbursed, how to work with volunteers”.

“The value of research in patient advocacy and organizational sustainability. I realized that patient organizations can play an active role in research, not only to generate evidence that improves patient care, but also to strengthen the sustainability of their organizations through research partnerships and funded projects. Building sustainable patient advocacy. The Academy reinforced that effective advocacy is about creating long-term impact through strategic partnerships, strong communication, and meaningful patient involvement, rather than relying only on individual campaigns or events. The power of international collaboration. Despite coming from very different healthcare systems across Europe, I was surprised by how many challenges we share. Exchanging experiences and solutions with advocates from other countries showed me how much we can learn from one another and how valuable this network is for advancing patient advocacy together.”

The aim of the WECAN Academy is to turn learning into action. The participants seem to share this vision as they mentioned that after Academy they want to do many things differently, including:

- review organization's governance practices to identify areas for further improvement
- strengthen how we collect, analyze and use data to support our advocacy,
- demonstrate our impact,
- seek and accept help of others in the future,
- be more human and strategic at the same time,
- start to collect evidence in a structured way,
- leverage all available systems and resources,
- place a much stronger focus on a systemic approach to patient advocacy and organizational development,
- will be more confident in our work and reinforce the belief that patient organizations can play a significant role in shaping healthcare systems and policies,
- take a more strategic and evidence-based approach to patient advocacy,
- strengthen collaborations with researchers, healthcare professionals and other patient organizations across Europe,
- place an even greater emphasis on long-term planning and building partnerships that create lasting value for patients rather than focusing only on individual initiatives.

QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS

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“The WECAN Academy was more than a training programme, it was an opportunity to become part of a European community of patient advocates. I am leaving with practical knowledge, valuable connections and renewed confidence to strengthen our organization’s work and better support children with cancer in Ukraine, even in the challenging context of war”.

“It is the best and safest environment to learn about advocacy, and make life-long connections with other advocates”.

“WECAN Academy 2026 was much more than a training experience - it was a truly transformative journey. For our organization and for me personally, this Academy represented an important milestone and a fundamental step toward becoming part of a wider international community of patient advocates. It gave us knowledge, inspiration, confidence, and, most importantly, the feeling that we are not alone in our mission to improve the lives of children with cancer and their families. What made WECAN Academy exceptional was its practical value. The sessions on advocacy, communication, leadership, and collaboration provided tools that can be immediately applied in real life.”

QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS

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“WECAN Academy was not just about learning theory - it was about gaining practical skills, building meaningful connections, and discovering new possibilities for creating change. It reminded me that every patient organization, regardless of its size, has the power to influence systems, improve policies, and amplify the voices of those who are often unheard. I left the Academy feeling empowered, motivated, and hopeful. Thank you, WECAN Academy, for giving us the tools, the confidence, and the community to make that vision a reality.”

“The WECAN Academy was an inspiring and empowering experience that brought together passionate patient advocates from across Europe. Beyond the valuable knowledge and practical skills, what made the programme truly special was the opportunity to connect with people facing similar challenges in different healthcare systems. I left with new ideas, meaningful connections and greater confidence to strengthen patient advocacy, research and the long-term sustainability of our organization. Thank you to the organizers, speakers and fellow participants for creating such a supportive and motivating learning environment.”



In Summary:

The WECAN Academy successfully delivered high-quality training, invaluable networking opportunities, and a strong sense of community, reinforcing its reputation as a leading initiative for cancer patient advocates.

THANK YOU



We thank our sponsors for making this event possible. Your support helps us drive forward a more inclusive, informed, and empowered advocacy landscape in cancer care.

