

Cancer in Australia 1996

**Incidence and mortality data for 1996
and selected data for 1997 and 1998**

CANCER SERIES

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and selected data for 1997 and 1998**

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Australasian Association of Cancer Registries

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Board Chair
Professor Janice Reid

Director
Dr Richard Madden

Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Mr Robert van der Hoek
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GPO Box 570
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: (02) 6244 1133

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Preface

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Australasian Association of Cancer Registries (AACR) are pleased to present *Cancer in Australia 1996*, an important publication generated from the National Cancer Statistics Clearing House (NCSCCH). This report contains the most recent available national cancer incidence and mortality data and is the most up-to-date national report that has ever been produced. This report, for the first time, includes data from another of the AACR members, New Zealand, and also reintroduces some international comparisons.

The cancer registries and the Institute have continued their efforts in improving national reporting timeliness. We acknowledge the efforts of all the cancer registries in compiling and providing timely data to the NCSCCH so that this important public health data set could be published. We intend to continue improvement in this area and, in addition, undertake a work program that encourages further standardisation of cancer registry information and increased analysis of the national data collection (e.g. survival analysis).

Cancer registration is a legal requirement in all States and Territories. The data are collected to monitor cancer trends, assist national efforts to understand the causes of cancer, and assist prevention efforts and treatment decisions. Data confidentiality and the uses to which cancer registry data can be put are controlled by State and Territory registries (under State and Territory law) and within the AIHW under the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*. The cancer registries together with the Institute and community organisations (e.g. cancer charity organisations) intend to promote further public awareness of their data collections and findings.

Richard Madden
Director
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Professor Bruce Armstrong
Chair
Australasian Association of Cancer Registries

Contributors

This AIHW National Cancer Statistics Clearing House report would not have been possible without the cooperation and effort of those who direct the operation, promotion and development of the State and Territory cancer registries. These people, identified below, have all worked together, through the Australasian Association of Cancer Registries, to produce the national cancer incidence statistics in this publication.

Incidence information provided by State and Territory cancer registries is sourced predominantly from hospitals, pathologists and departments of radiation oncology, with supplementary information provided by medical practitioners in private practice. The major contributors of information on cancer deaths are the State and Territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Funding and support of cancer registries in Australia is undertaken by State and Territory governments and various charity bodies. The AIHW acknowledges the support of the State and Territory governments, the New South Wales Cancer Council, the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, the Queensland Cancer Fund, the Cancer Foundation of Western Australia, the Northern Territory Anti-Cancer Foundation and the Australian Cancer Society. Finally, the contributions of the staff and volunteers who work with the State and Territory cancer registries are acknowledged.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Dr Paul Jelfs
Mr Robert van der Hoek
Ms Edith Christensen
Ms Kathy Southgate
Ms Amanda Nobbs

New South Wales

Professor Bruce Armstrong
Mrs Marylon Coates
Mrs Noreen Panos
Mrs Maria Arcorace

Victoria

Professor Graham Giles
Ms Kathryn Whitfield
Mrs Vicky Thursfield
Ms Sue Douglas

Western Australia

Dr Tim Threlfall
Dr Judy Thompson
Ms Kaye Garrod
Ms Charmaine Brewster
Ms Kathy Johnston
Ms Colleen Kontor

Queensland

Dr Ian Ring
Mrs Judy Symmons
Ms Sandra Martyn

South Australia

Assoc. Professor David Roder
Ms Lesley Milliken
Dr Wayne Clapton

Tasmania

Professor Terence Dwyer
Mrs Dace Shugg
Ms Rosie Ashbolt

Australian Capital Territory

Dr Bruce Shadbolt
Ms Barbara Stuart-Harris

Northern Territory

Dr John Condon
Mr Edouard D'Espaignet
Ms Karen Dempsey
Ms Maxene Woods

New Zealand

Ms Freddie Walker-Murray
Mr Paul Easton

Executive summary

This report presents national cancer incidence and mortality statistics and is part of the cancer series yearly publications. The State and Territory cancer registries provide the incidence data. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, which gets its information from the State and Territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages, provide mortality information.

Each year, approximately 345,000 new cancer cases are diagnosed in Australia. A large proportion of these, approximately 270,000, are non-melanocytic skin cancers. Incidence data for this cancer are not collected on a routine basis by cancer registries, and are not reported in this publication.

Excluding non-melanocytic skin cancers, there were 77,666 new cancer cases and 34,089 deaths due to cancer in Australia in 1996. At the incidence rates prevailing in 1996, it would be expected that 1 in 3 men and 1 in 4 women would be directly affected by cancer in the first 75 years of life. Further, nearly 261,300 potential years of life would be lost to the community each year as a result of people dying of cancer before the age of 75. Cancer currently accounts for 28% of male deaths and 25% of female deaths.

In males, prostate cancer (10,055 new cases diagnosed in 1996) is the most common registrable cancer, followed by colorectal cancer (6,067), lung cancer (5,228) and melanoma (4,313). These four cancers account for 60% of all registrable cancers in males.

In females, breast cancer (9,621) is the most common registrable cancer, followed by colorectal cancer (4,931), melanoma (3,448) and lung cancer (2,393). These four cancers account for 58% of all registrable cancers in females.

The most common cancers causing death are lung (4,743), prostate (2,644) and colorectal (2,474) cancers in males, and breast (2,619), colorectal (2,132) and lung (2,021) cancers in females.

The risk of cancer increases with age. The age-standardised incidence rate in 1996 for all cancers (excluding non-melanocytic skin cancers) was 16.1 per 100,000 for people aged less than 15 years and 2,149.6 per 100,000 for people aged 65 years and over.

Between 1990 and 1996, age-standardised incidence rates for all cancers (except non-melanocytic skin cancers) rose for both males and females by an average of 2.1% and 1.4% per year respectively but death rates declined by an average of 0.4% per year for both males and females. A significant proportion of the rises in incidence rates can be attributed to the recent upturn in prostate (1990-1994) and breast cancer incidence. Much of the rise in the incidence rates of prostate and breast cancer can be attributed to detection of these prevalent cancers after the introduction of prostate-specific antigen testing and breast screening programs.

While breast cancer incidence rates have continued to increase in 1996 and 1997, incidence rates for prostate and cervical cancers and male lung cancer have continued their decline.

Cigarette smoking is estimated to have directly caused 10,148 new cases of cancer and 6,986 deaths in 1996. Between 1990 and 1996, the male incidence rate for smoking-related cancers fell by an average of 1.2% per year, while the rate for females rose by 0.6% per year. Over the same period, mortality rates fell by 1.2% per annum for males and rose by 0.8% per annum for females.

A comparison with some countries with similar economic development to Australia shows that Australia's male and female incidence rates are fairly average but that our mortality rates compare favourably to the selected countries. Australia's melanoma rates are amongst the highest in the world while our colorectal rates are also relatively high. Stomach and lung cancer rates in Australia are lower than in most other countries. In a direct comparison with

New Zealand, there appears to be substantial differences in female mortality rates for several cancers, with cancers of the breast and lung showing the largest differences. Cancer incidence rates in New Zealand males are slightly higher than those of Australian males for most types of cancer.