

4.3 Cancer in Australia



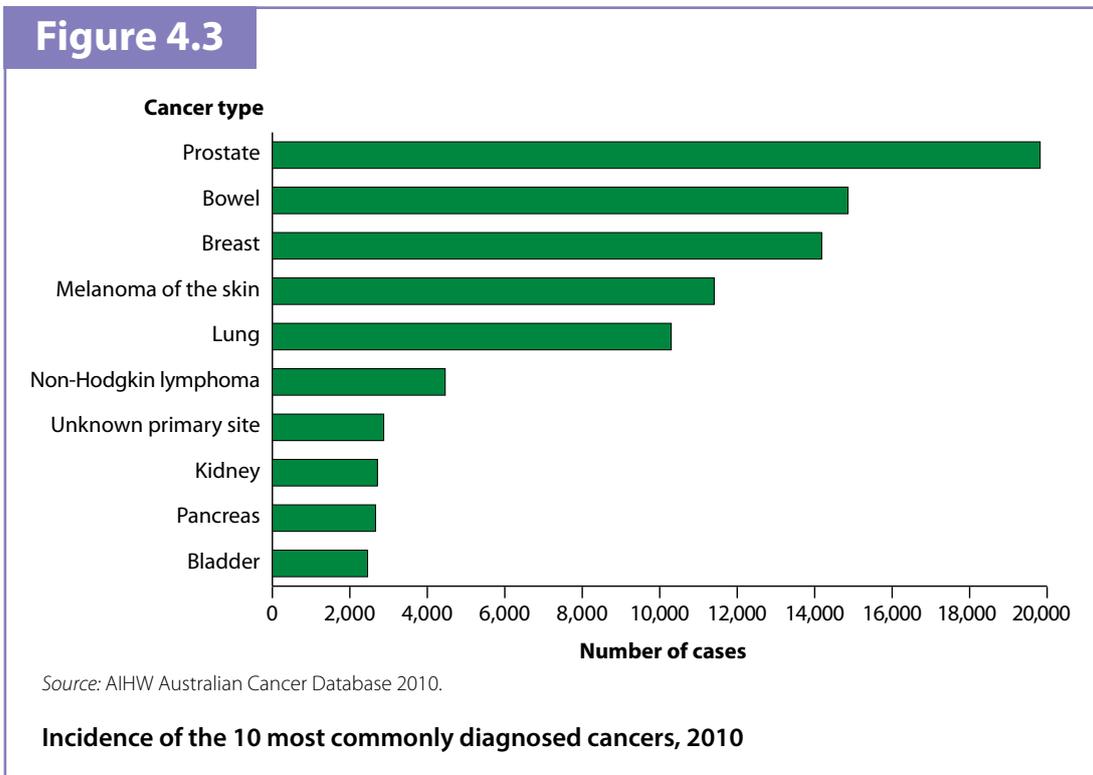
Cancer is a diverse group of several hundred diseases in which some of the body's cells become abnormal and begin to multiply out of control. The abnormal cells can invade and damage the tissue around them, and spread to other parts of the body, causing further damage and eventually death. Despite a decline in cancer deaths and an increase in survival over time, cancer is still the second-most common cause of death in Australia—after cardiovascular diseases. Cancer has a significant impact on individuals, families and the health-care system and has had a prominent policy focus for decades.

Incidence

- In 2010, 116,580 new cases of cancer were diagnosed in Australia (excluding basal and squamous cell carcinoma of the skin—the most common types of non-melanoma skin cancer). More than half (57%) of these cases were diagnosed in males.
- The risk of being diagnosed with any cancer before the age of 85 was 1 in 2 for males and 1 in 3 for females.
- The most commonly diagnosed cancers in 2010 were prostate in males (19,821), bowel (14,860), breast cancer in females (14,181), melanoma of the skin (11,405) and lung (10,296) (Figure 4.3).
- The number and rate of new cases of cancer have increased over time. Between 1990 and 2010, the age-standardised incidence rate (see Glossary) for total cancers rose by 16%, from 422 new cases per 100,000 people to 488 per 100,000. This was driven by rises in the incidence of prostate, breast and bowel cancers, due largely to improved detection and diagnosis of these cancers.
- The number of new cases of cancer diagnosed in Australia is projected to continue to rise over the next decade and is expected to reach 150,000 in 2020. This increase in the number of new cases, due primarily to population growth and ageing, is expected to be most evident among older populations.

Deaths

- In 2011, there were 43,221 deaths from cancer in Australia, accounting for 3 in 10 deaths. The risk of dying from cancer was 1 in 4 for males and 1 in 6 for females.
- The most common causes of cancer-related death in 2011 were lung (8,114 deaths), bowel (3,999), prostate in males (3,294), breast in females (2,937) and pancreatic (2,416) cancers.
- The number of cancer-related deaths has risen over time, but mortality rates have fallen. Between 1991 and 2011, the age-standardised mortality rate for all cancers combined fell by 17%, from 210 deaths per 100,000 people to 172 per 100,000. The fall in mortality rates was driven by falls in lung, prostate and bowel cancer death rates among males, and falls in breast and bowel cancer death rates among females.



Survival

- In 2006–2010, people diagnosed with cancer had a 66% chance of surviving for at least 5 years compared with their counterparts in the general population (referred to as 5-year survival, see Glossary). Among people who had already survived 5 years past their cancer diagnosis, the chance of surviving for at least another 5 years was 91%.
- Five-year survival from all cancers increased over time, from 47% in 1982–1987 to 66% in 2006–2010. Some of the likely reasons for this include better diagnostic methods, earlier detection and improvements in treatment.
- The cancers with the largest survival gains were prostate cancer, kidney cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. The cancers with a decline or no improvement in survival were bladder, larynx, lip and brain cancers, and chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.



Prevalence

- In 2007, about 1 in 28 living Australians had been diagnosed with cancer at some time in the previous 26 years (referred to as 26-year prevalence, see Glossary). This equates to 775,000 people, or 3.6% of the total population. The 26-year prevalence was highest for breast cancer (151,152 women), melanoma of the skin (136,016), prostate cancer (129,978 men) and bowel cancer (105,144).

Hospitalisations

- In 2011–12, there were more than 908,700 hospitalisations (see Glossary) for cancer or a cancer-related health service or treatment. Chemotherapy sessions accounted for 41% of these hospitalisations, followed by non-melanoma skin cancer (11%).

What is missing from the picture?

There are no national registry data on the stage (severity) of cancer at diagnosis, treatments applied to individual cases of cancer, the frequency of recurrence of cancer after treatment, or the incidence of non-melanoma skin cancers. The AIHW and Cancer Australia are working together to assess the feasibility of collecting, collating and reporting national data on: the stage of the disease when cancer is diagnosed; the treatments applied at each stage; and how frequently cancer recurs after treatment.

Where do I go for more information?

The reports, [Cancer in Australia: an overview, 2012](#), [Cancer incidence projections: Australia, 2011 to 2020](#), and [Cancer survival and prevalence in Australia: period estimates from 1982 to 2010](#), are available for free download.