

# Cancer now our biggest killer

*The Health Column*

1409

2014

21 May 2014

It's official, cancer has now overtaken heart disease as the biggest killer in Australia.

The latest report from the World Health Organization, *The World Cancer Report*, found 8.2 million people died from cancer globally in 2012, including some 43,000 Australians.

The report found cancer surpassed heart disease as the world's biggest killer in 2011, with 7.87 million cancer deaths compared to 7.02 million from heart disease.

The figures are staggering:

- 8.2 million deaths from cancer in 2012.
- Lung, liver, stomach, colorectal and breast cancers cause most deaths.
- 1.59 million lung cancer deaths in 2012.
- 745,000 liver cancer deaths in 2012.
- Tobacco use is the biggest risk factor, accounting for 70 per cent of lung cancer deaths.
- Africa, Asia, Central and South America account for 70 per cent of world's cancer deaths.

The most common cancers in Australia (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) are prostate, bowel, breast, melanoma and lung cancer. These five cancers account for over 60% of all cancers diagnosed in Australia.

Significantly, and perhaps because we love the outdoors so much, more than 434,000 people are treated for one or more non-melanoma skin cancers each year, with 543 people dying in 2011.

Experts forecast cancer rates increasing by three-quarters over the next two decades and they expect 20 million new cases globally by 2025.

The Cancer Council's statistics reflect those of the global WHO study. The Council says an estimated 124,910 new cases of cancer will be diagnosed in Australia this year, with that number set to rise to 150,000 by 2020. 1 in 2 Australian men and 1 in 3 Australian women will be diagnosed with cancer by the age of 85.



Photo by Gary Scott | freeimages.com

In Australia and other Western countries, the rise in cancer cases has been attributed to ageing populations and increased screening.

The report also says 3.7 million cancer deaths could have been avoided by lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, reducing alcohol intake and maintaining a healthy weight.

But the news is not all bad with research and medical breakthroughs lifting the survival rate so that today more than 60% of people diagnosed with cancer in Australia will survive more than five years after diagnosis. The survival rate for many common cancers has increased by 30 per cent in the past two decades.

The battle to find a cure for the various forms of cancer is accelerating as incidence rates spiral upwards, and finding new ways to raise funds for research is a challenge in itself. Cancer costs more than \$3.8 billion in direct health system costs (7.2%) and \$378 million was spent on cancer research in 2000-01, 22% of all health research expenditure in Australia.

One of the most popular fund raising events is the Cancer Council's Australia's Biggest Morning Tea which will be held on May 22. This fun event helps the Cancer Council to raise vital funds for cancer prevention, research and support services. Since 1993 people all over Australia have gathered in living rooms, community centres, schools and workplaces to celebrate Australia's Biggest Morning Tea. From humble beginnings the event has grown to be one of Australia's most popular fundraising events, enjoyed by more a million people each year. To become part of the event go to [www.biggestmorningtea.com.au](http://www.biggestmorningtea.com.au). The funds raised go to this very worthy cause which affects so many Australians.

You can get more advice and information from Fact Cards *Sense in the Sun* and *Breast Awareness and Pap Smear* found in pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information

Ring 1300 369 772 or log onto the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) and click on Self Care then 'Use the Self Care Pharmacy Finder' for the location of your nearest Self Care pharmacy.