



WHO Calls for Urgent Action as New Cancer Cases Are Projected to Nearly Double by 2050

Nearly 4 in 10 cancer cases are linked to preventable risk factors, such as hepatitis B and C, HPV, alcohol, tobacco use, obesity and insufficient physical activity.

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Millions of people are facing physical, emotional and financial toll of cancer, a disease that claims more than 26 000 lives every day, according to a report released today [July 8] by the World Health Organization (WHO). With an estimated 20.6 million new cases and close to 10 million deaths annually, cancer remains the second leading cause of death globally, after cardiovascular disease.

Reversing this trend will require a fundamental shift towards a people-centred approach that responds to the health needs and lived experiences of affected people and communities. Without urgent action, annual cancer cases are projected to rise to nearly 35 million by 2050.

The [WHO Global Status Report on Cancer 2026](#), developed jointly with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), provides comprehensive analysis of progress across key areas such as political commitment, cancer prevention – particularly through tobacco control and vaccination programmes – and investment in treatment.

However, the report also reveals persistent and widening inequities in access to prevention, diagnosis, treatment and supportive care, leaving millions of people without the services they need. Its analysis shows that while 87% of women with breast cancer survive at five years after their diagnosis in high-income countries, only about 42% do so in low-income countries. Fewer than one in three countries currently include cancer care in their universal health coverage packages.

“Cancer is a deeply personal disease that touches nearly all of us. But whether a person survives cancer should never depend on where they were born or what they earn,” said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. “The inequities documented in this report are not inevitable; they are the consequence of choices, and they can be reversed through stronger and unified action.”

Most people will be affected by cancer at some point in their lives, either through their own diagnosis or that of a close family member. Beyond its health impact, cancer remains one of the most financially and socially devastating challenges a household can face. WHO's first-ever survey of people affected by cancer found that at least 45% experience financial hardship, more than half report mental health challenges, and nearly all caregivers report strain including unpaid services and social isolation.

Cancer rates in different regions

The burden of cancer varies markedly across regions. In 2024, Asia accounted for the largest share, with more than half of all cancer cases (50.7%) and deaths (56.5%), reflecting its large population. Europe carried a disproportionately high burden, contributing 21% of global cases and 20% of deaths despite having only about 9% of the world's population. In contrast, many countries in Africa and parts of Asia experience lower incidence but disproportionately high mortality.

Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer death globally. Lung, prostate and colorectal cancers are among the most common cancers in men, while breast, lung and colorectal cancers account for a substantial share of the burden among women.

Nearly four in ten cancer cases globally are linked to preventable risk factors, particularly infections such as human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B and C, and helicobacter pylori, alcohol, tobacco use, high body mass index and insufficient physical activity, highlighting the critical role of prevention.

"While we are seeing reductions in some cancer rates in countries that have implemented prevention policies, progress has been too slow," said Dr Elisabete Weiderpass, Director of WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). "The cancer profile is evolving, increasingly driven by rising rates of obesity, physical inactivity, unhealthy diets, and air pollution. Cancer prevention must remain a political priority."

Major gains, yet gaps persist

The report notes substantial gains in key policy areas. Tobacco use has declined by 27% since 2010, contributing to reductions in lung cancer cases and deaths in some regions. Infection-related cancers are also decreasing thanks to expanding vaccination coverage and improved water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as well as infection prevention and control.

Political commitment has strengthened, with 82% of countries now having national cancer control plans, up from 50% in 2010. In high-income countries, early detection programmes catch most breast cancers and 74% of women have been screened for cervical cancer. Scientific innovation is accelerating; registered clinical trials have increased at an annual rate of 7.3% between 2005 and 2021.

Yet these advances are not translating into life-saving actions at the pace required. Essential cancer medicines remain far out of reach for many: availability of the top 20 priority cancer

medicines ranges from just 9% to 54% in low- and lower-middle-income countries, compared with 68% to 94% in high-income countries. And the consequences of these gaps are felt most acutely by people living with cancer and their families.

“Cancer is not just a medical diagnosis – it profoundly, indefinitely affects every aspect of a person’s life, and their family’s as well,” said Clarissa Schilstra, a childhood cancer survivor and a lead of WHO’s survey. “We urge policymakers to meaningfully engage with people affected by cancer. By voicing our lived experiences, we can inform more equitable, effective solutions to protect and promote the lives and wellbeing of future generations.”

Moving towards a people-centered cancer control agenda

The report marks an important opportunity to place people affected by cancer at the centre of cancer control efforts. It calls on governments, international organisations, civil society, academic institutions, the private sector, and WHO to work together to deliver a people-centred and holistic approach to care for individuals and families affected by cancer.

To support this vision, the report outlines seven key recommendations and three strategic shifts to be implemented across all countries and communities:

- Better capabilities: Integrate cancer control into universal health coverage and invest in human capital to prevent and control cancer;
- Better protections: Place people with lived experience at the centre of cancer systems while strengthening social protection; and
- Better value: Align research and innovation with public health needs and ensure equitable access to valued-based advances in care.

The choices made and actions taken today will shape the cancer burden borne by future generations. By adopting a people-centred approach, making strategic and sustained investments, and maintaining an unwavering commitment to equity, countries can reduce the cancer burden and improve outcomes for everyone, everywhere.

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