

NEW REPORT IMPLORES GOVERNMENT TO BREATHE URGENT LIFE INTO LUNG CANCER REFORM

Generations of Australians could have the Albanese Government to thank if it steps up at this critical moment for those living with lung cancer by adopting critical reforms set out in new Lung Foundation Australia report to save thousands of lives.

- **A family loses a loved one to lung cancer every hour:** Lung cancer remains our nation's biggest cancer killer, 1 in 5 don't receive any treatment after diagnosis, nearly half (48%) wait more than 42 days before accessing treatment, increasing the risk of their cancer spreading, and only 20% are still alive five years after their diagnosis.¹
- **Lung cancer continues to be an unfair fight:** Those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and First Nation Australians, are twice as likely to be diagnosed with, and die from, lung cancer and those living in regional, rural and remote areas have a 12% lower survival rate than those who live in major cities.¹
- **New report outlines three urgent interventions must be funded by Federal Government to turn the tide on lung cancer:**
 1. A national screening program in the upcoming October 2022 budget which will save 12,000 lives over 10 years
 2. Investment in 100 specialist lung cancer nurses by 2025 to care for the 22,800 Australians currently living with lung cancer (up from the meagre 37 in place currently caring for 616 each)
 3. Better support for lung cancer survivors as 50% are dealing with anxiety, distress, and/or depression (which is still 30% higher than other cancers)¹

2 AUGUST 2022, CANBERRA – Lung cancer has held the title of Australia's biggest cancer killer for too long. Today, with the release of a new report – *The Next Breath: Accelerating Lung Cancer Reform in Australia 2022-2025* – in Parliament House, Canberra, Lung Foundation Australia is calling on the nation's decision makers to adopt key reforms that will address the systemic gaps in lung cancer prevention, diagnosis and prognosis to save the lives of thousands of Australians.

Today, if you're diagnosed with lung cancer the chances are it will be caught too late, in the absence of a Government-funded national screening program. Your likelihood of surviving 5 years is just 20%. There are also chronically few specialist lung cancer nurses to care for you which increases the likelihood of emotional and psychosocial trauma, and sub-optimal care leading to worse outcomes.¹

In fact, despite the burden of disease, lung cancer has the lowest levels of Commonwealth funding for specialist nurses, of the top five cancers.¹

The new report, developed in collaboration with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), reveals the heartbreaking, growing burden, and the all too stagnant reality for Australians living with lung cancer.

"Despite incredible scientific advancements and significant new treatments now available, it is devastating to reflect, and see, that four years on from our first report of this kind released in 2018, improvements in lung cancer care across the country have been limited.

"We felt it was a watershed moment when the former Health Minister announced a scoping study on a national lung cancer screening program – but when the rubber hit the road, we've not seen this funded despite evidence of its impact.

“Those with lung cancer continue to face significant challenges at every stage of their disease, many of which we can assist with if we make critical changes now. It hasn’t been good enough, but we have faith that this new government will not leave those with lung cancer behind,” said Mark Brooke, CEO of Lung Foundation Australia.

Lung cancer can’t afford to be left behind by this new Parliament

The new Federal Government, the 47th Parliament, has an opportunity to drive the most fundamental change in the history of lung cancer. With innovations in screening and treatment, the day where more Australians than ever can survive lung cancer is within our reach.

A national lung cancer screening program could save 12,000 lives in its first 10 years

With more than half of all lung cancer diagnosed at a late stage (stage III or IV), screening allows for lung cancer to be detected when curative treatment options are available.¹

Following the 2021-2022 Federal Budget commitment of \$6 million for the early scoping of the program, which generated hope and excitement within the community, no further funding eventuated in the 2022-2023 Budget despite Cancer Australia’s recommendation regarding implementation.

There is an urgent need for the Australian Government to initiate a pilot program and develop national standards, with the aim of reaching full implementation by 2027.

“A targeted lung cancer screening program in Australia would enable unprecedented changes in how lung cancer is managed. It will tackle the persistently poor outcomes for lung cancer that we’ve seen over many decades,” said Associate Professor Nicole Rankin, Head of the Evaluation and Implementation Science Unit in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne, and Chair of the Steering Committee who oversaw the new report.

More specialist lung cancer nurses are needed now

“Of the only 37 Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in Australia, each must tend to a staggering 616 patients. Such a reality is beyond unfair to them and those in need of urgent, specialist care. This is a stark comparison to other cancers, with one nurse for every 185 patients with breast cancer, and more than double the number of prostate nurses than lung,” said Associate Professor Lucy Morgan, Leading Respiratory Physician and Lung Foundation Australia Board Chair.

“Those with access to a Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse are 44% more likely to receive treatment than those who do not and are more likely to experience reduced wait times from referral to treatment, improving the potential of better health outcomes, as well as playing a critical role in wellbeing and reducing mental and psychological distress.”

Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses make up a central component of a national screening program, to facilitate rapid referral into treatment centres, or to primary care for managing incidental findings.¹

The report reveals significant discrepancies in care for lung cancer across the country.

Nearly half (48%) of lung cancer patients wait more than the recommended 42 days from their diagnosis to commence treatment, with 20% never receiving treatment at all. Furthermore, upon diagnosis, almost 30% of people are not staged, potentially missing out on life-changing treatment and care specific to their lung cancer.¹

Those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (low SES), and First Nation Australians, are twice as likely to be diagnosed with and to die from lung cancer than people in higher SES areas. Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas have a 12% lower survival rate than those who live in major cities.¹

A heartbreaking 50% of lung cancer patients report mental health concerns¹

Too many are suffering alone, with a 30% higher than average prevalence of poor mental health compared to other cancers – which hasn't shifted since 2018. With insufficient services across the country to offer support, we also see higher levels of psychological, physical and daily living needs left unmet.¹

Stigma further exacerbates psychological distress placing those with lung cancer at a high risk of suicide. Approximately 1 in 3 people blame themselves for their diagnosis, which may further increase delays to diagnosis and treatment.¹

Lung cancer can happen to anyone. Approximately one fifth (21%) of those with cancer are life-long non-smokers.¹

It's time to broaden our focus and look beyond just diagnosis and treatment, working towards a holistic approach to lung cancer care.

We need to act now to ensure lung cancer is no longer left behind.

For those who'd like to share their support for all those living with and impacted by lung cancer, please visit lungfoundation.com.au/blueprint and share the report recommendations on your social media.

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References:

1. The Next Breath: Accelerating Lung Cancer Reform in Australia. Lung Foundation Australia. August 2022.