INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the greatest health burdens for the ACT population. Advances in prevention, early detection and treatment mean that more people are surviving and living longer with cancer. This Focus On report gives an overview of cancer statistics in the ACT. Following Focus On reports will describe the trends of different types of cancer in more detail.

CANCER INCIDENCE

What do we know about cancer incidence in the ACT?

In 2013, 1,547 new cases of cancer (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) were diagnosed in ACT residents. The incidence rate for the ACT in 2013 was 418.6 cases per 100,000 people compared to 482.7 cases per 100,000 people for Australia in 2013.

The median age at diagnosis was older for males at 66 years than females who had a median age at diagnosis of 63 years. More males than females are diagnosed with cancer each year.

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

Figure 1: All cancers in the ACT, age-standardised incidence rates per 100,000, males and females, 1994–2013

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

Notes: 1. Rates were age-standardised to the 2001 Australian population.
2. Rates are 3-year leading averages (i.e. the average of the year listed and the two previous years).

CANCER DEATHS

What do we know about cancer deaths in the ACT?

In 2012, 422 people died from cancer. The mortality rate for the ACT in 2012 was 123.3 deaths per 100,000 people compared to 169.3 deaths per 100,000 people for Australia in 2012.

The median age for cancer death was 75 years for both males and females. More males than females die from cancer each year.

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

Figure 2: All cancers in the ACT, age-standardised death rates per 100,000, males and females, 1994–2012

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

Notes: 1. Rates were age-standardised to the 2001 Australian population.
2. Rates are 3-year leading averages (i.e. the average of the year listed and the two previous years).
How have cancer death rates changed over time for males?

For males, after adjusting for age, the death rate decreased by 2.7% each year between 1994 and 2012 (Figure 2).

It is likely that this reduction since 1994 can be attributed to decreases in death rates for lung cancer, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer.2

How have cancer death rates changed over time for females?

For females, after adjusting for age, the death rate decreased by 2.1% each year between 1994 and 2012 (Figure 2).

It is likely that this reduction is due to decreases in death rates from breast cancer and colorectal cancer.2

The number of cancer cases is increasing as our population grows and ages.

Despite trends in incidence rates in males and females being relatively stable overall since 1994 the number of cases of cancer in the ACT has increased considerably over that time due to population increases and the ageing of the population (Figure 3). 2

As one of the major risk factors for cancer is older age, the number of people with cancer in the ACT is likely to increase as the proportion of older people in the population grows.

Similarly, while there has been a decrease in death rates for both males and females, there has been an increase in the number of deaths from cancer for both sexes because of the increase in the population of the ACT and the growth in the proportion of older people in the population (Figure 4).
What are the most common types of cancer in males in the ACT?

For the period 2009–2013, the five most commonly diagnosed cancers accounted for 67% of all newly diagnosed cancers in males (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Common cancers diagnosed in males in the ACT, 2009–2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cancer Type</th>
<th>Average Number of ACT Cases per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prostate</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorectal</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanoma of skin</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

What are the most common types of cancer in females in the ACT?

For the period 2009–2013, the five most commonly diagnosed cancers accounted for 67% of all newly diagnosed cancers in females (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Common cancers diagnosed in females in the ACT, 2009–2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cancer Type</th>
<th>Average Number of ACT Cases per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breast</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorectal</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanoma of skin</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uterine</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

How have the most common types of cancer in males changed over time?

Figure 7 shows the changes over time in the number of cases for the five most common cancers in males. There have been increases in the numbers of cases for the five most common cancers in males, but the biggest impact on the overall number of cases comes from prostate cancer.

**Figure 7: Number of cases of cancer diagnosed in ACT males, five most common cancers, 1994–2013**

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

How have the most common types of cancer in females changed over time?

Figure 8 shows the changes over time in the number of cases for the five most common cancers in females. There have been increases in the numbers of cases for the five most common cancers in females, but the biggest impact on the overall number of cases comes from breast cancer.

**Figure 8: Number of cases of cancer diagnosed in ACT females, five most common cancers, 1994–2013**

Source: ACT Cancer Registry, Epidemiology Section, ACT Health

What do we measure

The *ACT Cancer Registry* registers all new cases of cancer diagnosed (cancer incidence) in ACT residents (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) and all deaths of people with cancer in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the burden of cancer across our population. This information is used to improve cancer prevention programs, evaluate how well cancer screening programs are working, and to provide statistics to better plan cancer health services and policies for cancer prevention and health care. The data are also used to monitor the health outcomes of people who are diagnosed with and treated for cancer in the ACT.
COMMON CAUSES OF CANCER DEATH

What are the most common causes of cancer death in the ACT?

For the period 2008–2012, the five most common causes of death from cancer accounted for 53% of all cancer deaths in males (Figure 9) and 61% in females (Figure 10).

For males the five most common causes of cancer death were from lung, colorectal and prostate cancers, cancers of indefinite and unspecified site and pancreatic cancer.

For females the five most common causes of cancer death were lung, breast, colorectal and pancreatic cancers, and cancers of indefinite and unspecified site.

Figure 9: Common causes of cancer death in males, ACT, 2008–2012

Figure 10: Common causes of cancer death in females, ACT, 2008–2012

PREVENTING CANCER

Recent Australian research shows that more than one third of cancers may be preventable through lifestyle modification.3, 4 There are several key risk factors that if modified may prevent lifestyle attributable cancers. These are:

- Tobacco smoking
- Insufficient physical activity
- Excess body weight
- Alcohol consumption
- Dietary factors such as not eating enough vegetables, fruits and whole grains, and eating too much red or processed meat
- Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation
- Unsafe sex or drug use
- Occupational exposures & hazards.

Cancer screening programs

Cancer screening can help detect some cancers early which can significantly improve outcomes.

- **Cervical cancer** — Women aged between 25-74 years need a cervical screening test every five years, even if they have received the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. Talk to your GP. For more information see: [http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/internet/screening/publishing.nsf/content/cervical-screening-1](http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/internet/screening/publishing.nsf/content/cervical-screening-1)

Note

All rates in this report were age-standardised to the 2001 Australian population.

REFERENCES