



Cancer and women

Clearinghouse Connector – April 2017

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Introduction

In Australia, cancer deaths comprise 27% of all female causes of death, and 36% of female years of life lost.¹ According to the Victorian Cancer Registry², the cancers with the highest incidence in Victorian women are breast cancer, followed by bowel cancer, melanoma, then lung cancer. The Victorian cancer plan 2016–2020 provides the current Victorian context for cancer care and control.

The gendered experience of women diagnosed with any type of cancer needs greater research and consideration. While female breast cancer has a 5-year survival rate of 94%,³ many other cancers have significantly lower 5-year survival rates (colorectal 69%, ovarian 42% and lung 20%).⁴

Risk factors, screening, prevention and health promotion messages should all be examined through a gender lens to ensure that strategies in each of these areas are targeted to the needs and experiences of women.

Cancer diagnosis and treatment can have specific impacts for women that relate to gender. Caring responsibilities, the impact on body image, reproduction and menopause, sexuality and relationships and financial considerations are all issues that can affect women's diagnosis, treatment and long-term outlook. Research also suggests that the psychological implications of cancer are greater for women, and that psychosocial support is integral to women's wellbeing and outcomes.

Cancer risk increases with age. An ageing and growing population is leading to increasing cancer diagnoses. This coupled with increasing survival following cancer diagnosis and treatment is resulting in more women living in the 'survivorship' phase which follows diagnosis and active treatment. This means that risk reduction and wellbeing strategies such as healthy weight management and exercise are becoming more important factors in wellbeing following cancer.

Some cancers among women have known means of prevention and/or early detection which can be applied to reduce incidence and mortality.⁵ Cancer policies and strategies would be strengthened by the inclusion of gender-specific content, informed by research into the risks, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment responses and lived experience of women with non-reproductive cancers.

WHV thanks the following expert reviewers for their input:

- **Amanda Piper** – Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre
 - **Kate Broun** – Cancer Council Victoria
 - **Vicky Thursfield** – Victorian Cancer Registry
 - **Carole Arbuckle** – Cancer Council Victoria
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Incidence and context in Australia

[Lung cancer rates in Australian women on track to surpass men by 2017](#) Cancer Council NSW, 2015

[Bowel cancer deaths set to rise in women](#) Bowel Cancer Australia, 2015

[A men's disease myth: two in three underestimate the risk of bowel cancer for women, survey suggests](#) Sydney Morning Herald, 2016

[Skin cancer incidence and mortality *In: Skin cancer statistics and issues*](#) Cancer Council, 2016 – see *section 2.1 Gender*

Risk factors

[Women and cancer: your guide to reducing your risk of cancer](#) Cancer Council NSW, 2015

[Get checked: women](#) Cancer Council Australia, 2016

[Sex- and gender-specific disparities in colorectal cancer risk](#) World Journal of Gastroenterology, 2015

[Women's awareness of cancer symptoms: a review of the literature](#) Women's Health, 2012

[Passion for tans pushing up skin cancer rates for women](#) Sunshine Coast Daily, 2016

Screening and diagnosis

[Gender differences in attitudes impeding colorectal cancer screening](#) BMC Public Health, 2013

[More boys are diagnosed with cancer than girls worldwide: why?](#) The Conversation, 2016

[Earlier diagnosis of bladder cancer could improve survival rates in women](#) Public Health England, 2015

[Colorectal cancer in women \[Case Study\]](#) Sex and Gender Women's Health Collaborative, 2016

Sexual and reproductive health

[Fertility after breast cancer and strategies to help women achieve pregnancy](#) Cancer Forum (Cancer Council Australia), 2017

[Fertility preservation: a key survivorship issue for young women with cancer](#) Frontiers in Oncology, 2016

[Sexual dysfunction after breast cancer: a review of treatments and strategies](#) Cancer Forum (Cancer Council Australia), 2017

[Perceived causes and consequences of sexual changes after cancer for women and men: a mixed method study](#) BMC Cancer, 2015. [Australia]

[Feeling well and talking about sex: psycho-social predictors of sexual functioning after cancer](#) BMC Cancer, 2014. [Australia]

[Sexual health as a survivorship issue for female cancer survivors](#) The Oncologist, 2013

[Sexuality, lung cancer, and the older adult: an unlikely trio?](#) Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology, 2013

[Psychological correlates of sexual dysfunction in female rectal and anal cancer survivors: analysis of baseline intervention data](#) Journal of Sexual Medicine, 2013

Therapy

[Can gender play a role in determining cancer treatment choices?](#) Oncology News Australia, 2016

[Females suffer from gender gap in cancer trials, drug development](#) Newsweek, 2016

[Gender disparity in survival from bladder cancer \[Transcript\]](#) ABC Radio National, 2015

[The gender perspective in cancer research and therapy: novel insights and on-going hypotheses](#) Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2016

Living with cancer

[4 women share what it's like to have colon cancer](#) Women's Health, 2015

[My year of lung cancer, pictured day by day: woman diagnosed with disease documents her journey](#) Daily Mail Australia, 2014

[Cancer, work and you: a guide for people with cancer, their families and friends](#) Cancer Council NSW, 2017

Mental health / Body image

[Anxiety and depression in women with breast cancer](#) Cancer Forum (Cancer Council Australia), 2017

[Psychosocial and psychological challenges facing women diagnosed with cancer \[Thesis\]](#) Winona State University, 2016

[Lives affected by cancer: 800 women speak](#) Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association (CCTFA), 2011

[Life after diagnosis and treatment of cancer in adulthood: contributions from psychosocial oncology research](#) American Psychologist, 2015. [USA]

Advanced cancer

[Does gender influence outcomes from a multidisciplinary intervention for quality of life designed for patients with advanced cancer?](#) Supportive Care In Cancer, 2013

Long term outcomes

[Life after lung cancer: survivorship research and behavioral intervention are needed](#) World Cancer Research Journal, 2014

[Report on lung cancer in Australia: literature review and consultation on factors impacting on lung cancer outcomes](#) Cancer Australia. National Lung Cancer Program, 2011.

Media portrayal / Public opinion

[‘It’s your fault you got cancer’: the blame game that doesn’t help anyone](#) The Conversation, 2016

[Does lung cancer have a gender bias?](#) Huffington Post, 2016

[Lung cancer rates soaring for women after tobacco manufacturers target them by saying smoking helps you stay slim](#) Daily Mail Australia, 2012

Policy and promising practice

[Victorian cancer plan 2016-2020](#) Victoria. Department of Health, 2016

[Optimal Care Pathways \[Series\]](#) Cancer Council Victoria, 2014-2016

[Model of survivorship care: critical components of cancer survivorship care in Australia](#) Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA), 2016

Related websites

[BreaCan](#)

[Cancer Council Victoria](#)

[Cancer Council Australia](#)




[Cancer Council Australia](#) LGBTI communities and cancer support

[American Lung Association](#) Lung Force (for women)

[Macmillan Cancer Support](#) Effects of treatment on a woman's sexuality

[Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre](#) Support for survivors

Footnotes

1. AIHW (2016). [Australian burden of disease study: impact and causes of illness and deaths in Australia 2011](#). Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Accessed on 07/04/2017. 
 2. Cancer Council Victoria (2015). [Cancer Statistics Victoria : Time Trends by Sex : Cancer Trends, Victoria \(Incidence\)](#). Cancer Council Victoria. Accessed on 07/04/2017. 
 3. Cancer Council Victoria (2016). [Cancer in Victoria : statistics and trends 2015](#). Cancer Council Victoria, p. 28. Accessed on 07/04/2017. 
 4. Cancer Council Victoria (2016). [Cancer in Victoria : statistics and trends 2015*](#). Cancer Council Victoria, p. 30. Accessed on 07/04/2017. 
 5. American Cancer Society (2016). [Global burden of cancer in women : current status, trends, and interventions](#). American Cancer Society, p. 104. Accessed on 07/04/2017. 
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How our Clearinghouse can help you

Women's Health Victoria's Clearinghouse has a wealth of information on gender in health in various forms. Our experienced health and information professionals can assist you to access this information.

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Women's Health Victoria acknowledges the support of the [Victorian Government](#)

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