

4 FEBRUARY – WORLD CANCER DAY: A LEADING INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS DAY

World Cancer Day is an international day marked every 4 February to raise awareness of cancer, encourage its prevention, and mobilize action to address the global cancer epidemic.

The day is led by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) and was established in 2000.

By coordinating individual, collective, and governmental action, we all work together to envision a world in which millions of cancer deaths are prevented and access to life-saving cancer treatment and care is equal for everyone, regardless of who you are or where you live.

Every year, hundreds of activities and events take place around the world, bringing together communities, organizations, and individuals in schools, businesses, hospitals, markets, parks, municipal halls, places of worship—on the streets and online—serving as a powerful reminder that we all have a role to play in reducing the global impact of cancer.

UICC delivers World Cancer Day campaigns in three-year cycles to enable deeper exploration of a specific theme and to achieve greater impact.

The theme of the World Cancer Day campaign for 2025–2027, “United by Unique,” puts people at the center of care and explores new ways to make a difference.

Cancer is more than just a medical diagnosis—it is deeply personal. Behind every diagnosis lies a unique human story—stories of grief, pain, healing, resilience, love, and much more.

Therefore, a people-centered approach to cancer care that fully integrates the unique needs of each individual, with compassion and empathy, leads to the best health outcomes.

Every experience with cancer is unique, and it will take all of us, united, to create a world where we look beyond the disease and see the person before the patient—a world in which the needs of people and communities are at the heart of health systems.

WHY CANCER?

Cancer is one of the leading global health challenges and the second leading cause of death worldwide. Millions of new cases are diagnosed every year. About 1 in 5 people will face cancer at some point in their lifetime.

KEY FACTS

New cases:

Approximately 20 million

Annual deaths:

10 million

Preventable deaths:

Over 40% of cancer-related deaths are linked to modifiable risk factors.

Early detection:

Nearly one-third of all cancer deaths can be prevented through routine screening, early detection, and treatment.

Geographic impact:

70% of cancer deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Economic costs:

USD 1.6 trillion

Estimated total annual global economic cost of cancer.

- Half of the world's population lacks access to essential health services. Despite significant progress, this disparity—known as the equity gap—costs lives and is influenced by factors such as income, education, geographic location, and discrimination, collectively known as the “social determinants of health.”
- Many disadvantaged groups face higher cancer risks due to factors such as tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and unhealthy diets. These are known as the “commercial determinants of health.”

WHAT HAPPENS

WHEN WE ACT?

Millions of lives can be saved each year by implementing strategies for prevention, early detection, and treatment appropriate to available resources.

More than one-third of cancer cases can be prevented.

One-third of cancer cases can be cured if detected early and treated properly.

PROGRESS

Today, we know more about cancer than ever before.

By investing in research and innovation, we are witnessing remarkable breakthroughs in medicine, diagnostics, and scientific knowledge.

The more we know, the more we can advance in reducing risk factors, increasing prevention, and improving diagnosis, treatment, and care for people with cancer.

IMPACT

In recent years, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and other UN agencies have recognized the urgent need for global commitment.

When leaders speak out and take action, we are given the opportunity to make history and move toward a world without cancer.

EQUITY

Today, more than two-thirds (70%) of cancer deaths occur in the least developed parts of the world. Even in higher-income countries, inequalities still exist within communities—among lower-income populations, immigrants, refugees, and people living in rural areas.

Equal access to cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care can save lives.

CHANGE

By raising public and political awareness and understanding of cancer, we reduce fear, increase knowledge, dispel myths and misconceptions, and change behaviors, attitudes, and actions.

Cancer is more than just a medical diagnosis—it is deeply personal. Therefore, a people-centered approach to cancer care leads to the best health outcomes and is essential for change.

The new World Cancer Day campaign for 2025–2027, “United by Unique,” will explore the different dimensions of people-centered cancer care and new ways to make a difference.

WHAT IS CANCER?

Cancer is a disease in which the cells in the body begin to divide uncontrollably. It can affect almost any part of the body. There are over 100 different types of cancer.

Types of Tumors

- ***Benign tumors:*** Non-cancerous and rarely life-threatening. They grow slowly and do not spread to other parts of the body.
- ***Malignant tumors:*** Cancerous, grow faster than benign tumors, and can spread and destroy nearby tissues. They can metastasize, forming secondary tumors.
- ***Precancerous conditions:*** Abnormal cells that may develop into cancer.

Types of Cancer

Cancer can be classified based on the type of cell from which it originates. The five main types include:

- ***Carcinoma:*** Arises from epithelial cells. Common types include breast, prostate, lung, and colorectal cancers.
- ***Sarcoma:*** Cancer of the bones or soft tissues. Common types include leiomyosarcoma, liposarcoma, and osteosarcoma.
- ***Lymphoma and Myeloma:*** Begin in immune system cells. Includes lymphatic system cancers and multiple myeloma.
- ***Leukemia:*** Cancer of white blood cells and bone marrow.
- ***Brain and spinal cord cancers:*** Known as cancers of the central nervous system.

Most Common Types of Cancer

- ***Lung cancer*** – the leading cause of cancer death
- ***Breast cancer*** – most common among women
- ***Colorectal cancer***
- ***Prostate cancer*** – common among men
- ***Skin cancer*** – increasing due to sun exposure

(Incidence varies by age, sex, and lifestyle.)

Most Common Causes and Risk Factors

Many cases of cancer result from a combination of genetic and external factors. The main risks include:

- **Tobacco (smoking):** The greatest risk factor for lung cancer and a significant contributor to other types of cancer.
- **Unhealthy diet and obesity**
- **Alcohol consumption**
- **Low physical activity**
- **Air pollution:** Especially important for lung cancer and in people who have never smoked.
- **Infections (HPV, hepatitis):** Major contributors to cervical and liver cancers in low- and middle-income countries.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CANCER?

Because there are many different types of cancer, symptoms vary depending on where the disease occurs. However, there are key signs and symptoms to watch for, including:

- **Unusual lumps or swelling:** Cancerous lumps are often painless and may grow as cancer progresses.
- **Coughing, shortness of breath, or difficulty swallowing:** Pay attention to persistent episodes.
- **Changes in bowel habits:** Such as constipation, diarrhea, and/or presence of blood in the stool.
- **Unexpected bleeding:** Includes vaginal bleeding, bleeding from the anus, or blood in stool, urine, or sputum.

- **Unexplained weight loss:** Rapid, unintentional loss of weight over a few months.
- **Fatigue:** Extreme tiredness or lack of energy. Fatigue related to illness is usually accompanied by other symptoms.
- **Pain:** Unexplained or persistent pain, or pain that comes and goes.
- New mole or changes in an existing mole: Look for changes in size, shape, or color; formation of a crust; or bleeding.
- **Urination problems:** Includes urgent need to urinate, frequent urination, inability to urinate when needed, or pain during urination.
- **Unusual breast changes:** Changes in size, shape, or feel of the breasts; presence of a painful or painless lump; skin changes; or pain.
- **Loss of appetite:** Lack of hunger over an extended period.
- **Sores or ulcers that do not heal:** Including bumps, painful sores, or mouth ulcers.
- **Burning sensation in the stomach:** Persistent heartburn.
- **Excessive night sweats:** Pay attention to very heavy sweating during the night.

Most of these signs and symptoms are more likely caused by conditions less serious than cancer, but early detection is crucial if it is cancer. If you notice any changes that are unusual for you or persist over time, do not hesitate to consult your doctor.

TOBACCO USE IS THE LEADING PREVENTABLE CAUSE OF CANCER

However, there are various risk factors and preventive actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of cancer:

Tobacco use is linked to about 15 types of cancer, including lung and liver cancer. Quitting smoking significantly extends life expectancy and improves quality of life.

Limiting alcohol intake reduces the risk of cancers of the mouth, esophagus, and breast.

Regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight lower the risk of several types of cancer, including colorectal and kidney cancers.

Reducing exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun and avoiding tanning beds helps prevent skin cancer.

Occupational exposure to substances such as asbestos increases cancer risk, and policies to minimize this exposure can help.

Chronic infections cause about 16% of cancers worldwide, and vaccines against Hepatitis B (HBV) and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) help prevent liver and cervical cancers.

WHAT INDIVIDUALS CAN DO

Adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Avoid tobacco and excessive alcohol.

Limit sun exposure.

Get vaccinated and encourage others to do the same.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO

Implement vaccination programs.

Regulate tanning salons.

Ban asbestos.

Promote public health campaigns.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

Educate about cancer risk factors.

Promote healthy diet and physical activity.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

Implement policies to prevent exposure to carcinogens.

Promote healthy lifestyles.

WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN DO

Develop environments that support health and well-being.

SECONDARY CANCER PREVENTION

Secondary prevention focuses on screening and early detection, aiming to identify cancer at its earliest stage when treatment outcomes are most effective.

“UNITED AGAINST CANCER”

Cancer is not only a health issue but also a societal problem. Through knowledge, prevention, and support, we can make a difference. Every step toward a healthy life matters.

Prevention = Healthy Habits

According to the latest WHO and leading health institution recommendations:

Prevention of risk factors:

- Do not smoke and avoid passive smoking.
- Be physically active every day (at least 30 minutes).
- Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Reduce stress.
- Get sufficient sleep.

International data indicate that 30–50% of cancer cases can be prevented through risk reduction and healthy habits.

Screening and Early Detection

Routine screening tests, such as mammograms for breast cancer, Pap tests for cervical cancer, and colonoscopy for colorectal cancer, are crucial. These tests can detect abnormalities before symptoms appear, allowing for early intervention.

Early detection is one of the most powerful tools for improving survival. For example, breast cancer detected at an early stage has a 5-year survival rate of 99%, compared to 27% if detected at a late stage. Regular check-ups can lead to prompt treatment, reducing cancer mortality.

Early Detection – Why It's Key

Cancer in its early stage often has no strong symptoms.

Regular check-ups allow:

- Early initiation of treatment
- Better outcomes
- Longer and higher-quality life
- Early detection can save millions of lives.

Awareness = Saved Lives

Cancer remains one of the leading causes of death globally, with millions of new cases and deaths each year.

The number of cases will continue to rise, especially with aging populations and risk exposures.

A significant portion of cancers can be prevented through lifestyle changes and public health measures.

Screening and early detection are essential for reducing mortality.

Public awareness and education about the importance of screening can encourage more people to participate in life-saving tests. Health care providers should ensure accessible and affordable screening services to reach broader populations, especially in underserved areas.

By prioritizing screening and early detection, we can further reduce the global burden of cancer.

- The Role of Young People
- Build healthy habits from an early age
- Share accurate information
- Provide support and empathy to those affected
- Participate in awareness campaigns
- Inform and educate peers
- Take responsibility for personal health

Source: [World Cancer Day](#)

Prepared by: Department for health promotion and monitoring of diseases