

Victorian Cancer Registry

Cancer Facts

Number 10 - July 2017



Bowel cancer in Victoria

Bowel cancer is cancer in any part of the large bowel. It is also known as colorectal cancer and might also be called colon cancer or rectal cancer, depending on where it starts.

How common is cancer of the bowel?

In 2015, 3,810 Victorians were diagnosed with bowel cancer, 55% of whom were men. Bowel cancer accounted for 12% of all cancers diagnosed and 13% of cancer deaths in Victoria, ranking third for incidence and second for cancer mortality.

Trends in bowel cancer

Since 1982, the overall incidence and mortality rates for bowel cancer have been declining with annual average decreases of 0.3% and 0.5% (male and female incidence), and 2.0% and 2.4% (male and female mortality) respectively. During the last ten years, the average annual rates of decrease were higher for incidence (1.9% and 0.9% for males and females respectively) but lower for mortality (1.7% and 1.1% for males and females), than for the whole period.

Cancer stage at diagnosis

In 2015, the proportions of bowel carcinomas by stage¹ were:

Stage 1	24%
Stage 2	24%
Stage 3	23%
Stage 4	18%
Unknown	11%

The proportion of early Stage (Stages 1 and 2) bowel carcinomas has changed very little over time - in the three time periods 2007-2009, 2010-2012 and 2013-2015, the proportion was 46%, 44% and 46% respectively.

Bowel cancer incidence by region in 2011-2015

The incidence and mortality for bowel cancer varies across regions of Victoria - there are many possible reasons for these differences including population size, age distribution and ethnicity, and lifestyle factors such as diet and physical activity and obesity. Generally, incidence increases with increasing distance from the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Survival for Victorians with bowel cancer

The five-year survival of all Victorians with bowel cancer in 2011-2015 was 69%, a significant increase from 49% in 1986-1990.

Survival was slightly higher for women (70%) than for men (68%), and decreased with increasing age (5-year survival 75% in those aged Under 55 years, 72% in those aged 55-74 years and 63% in those aged over 75 years).

Survival for bowel cancer shows a very steep gradient with stage at diagnosis, with those diagnosed with Stage 1 disease having survival close to that expected for the unaffected population, whilst for those diagnosed with distant metastatic disease (Stage 4), survival is only 15%.

Bowel cancer survival by region in 2011-2015

Overall, the relative survival from bowel cancer in Melbourne metropolitan region (69%) did not differ significantly from that for the rest of Victoria (68%), and the overall survival differences between the eight Victorian Integrated Cancer Services (ICS) regions were also not statistically significant. The table below shows overall survival, and survival for early stage (Stage 1 and 2) and late stage (Stage 3 and 4) bowel cancer by region.

Region	Five-year survival (%)		
	All stages	Early stage	Late stage
Southern	70	95	46
West & Central	67	91	45
North Eastern	71	94	49
Barwon	69	94	48
Grampians	65	90	42
Loddon-Mallee	68	92	44
Hume	68	93	43
Gippsland	70	94	48

Individual comparisons between regions are difficult owing to small numbers and wide confidence intervals (available on request) for less populous regions.

- 3,801 Victorians were diagnosed with, and 1,389 died from, bowel cancer in 2015
- Almost as many Victorians die from bowel cancer as from breast and prostate cancer combined (1,440 in 2015)
- There are almost 35,000 Victorians living today who have had a diagnosis of bowel cancer - of these, 60% have survived more than 5 years
- Five-year survival from bowel cancer is 69%
- The prognosis for Victorians with bowel cancer is very good if their cancer is found at an early stage - 5-year survival for those with Stage 1 disease is 98% and Stage 2 disease is 90%

Bowel cancer by socio-economic status

Analysis was undertaken of bowel cancer incidence and relative survival by socioeconomic status (SES). SES was defined as quintiles of the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (Australian Bureau of Statistics²) based on a person's usual residential address at the time of diagnosis, with Quintile 1 being the most disadvantaged and Quintile 5 the least disadvantaged. For both men and women, bowel cancer incidence rates were higher for those with lower SES, and decreased with increasing SES (most markedly for men).

Figure 2 shows five-year relative survival (2004-2013) by SES with a clear gradient of higher survival with higher SES.

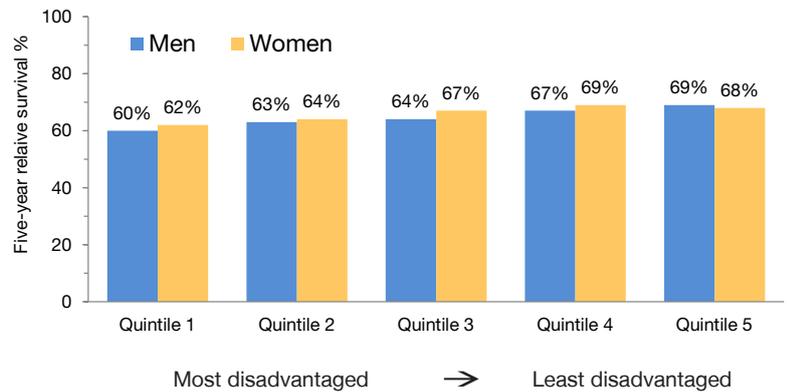


Figure 2: Relative survival by SES for Victorian men and women, 2004-2013

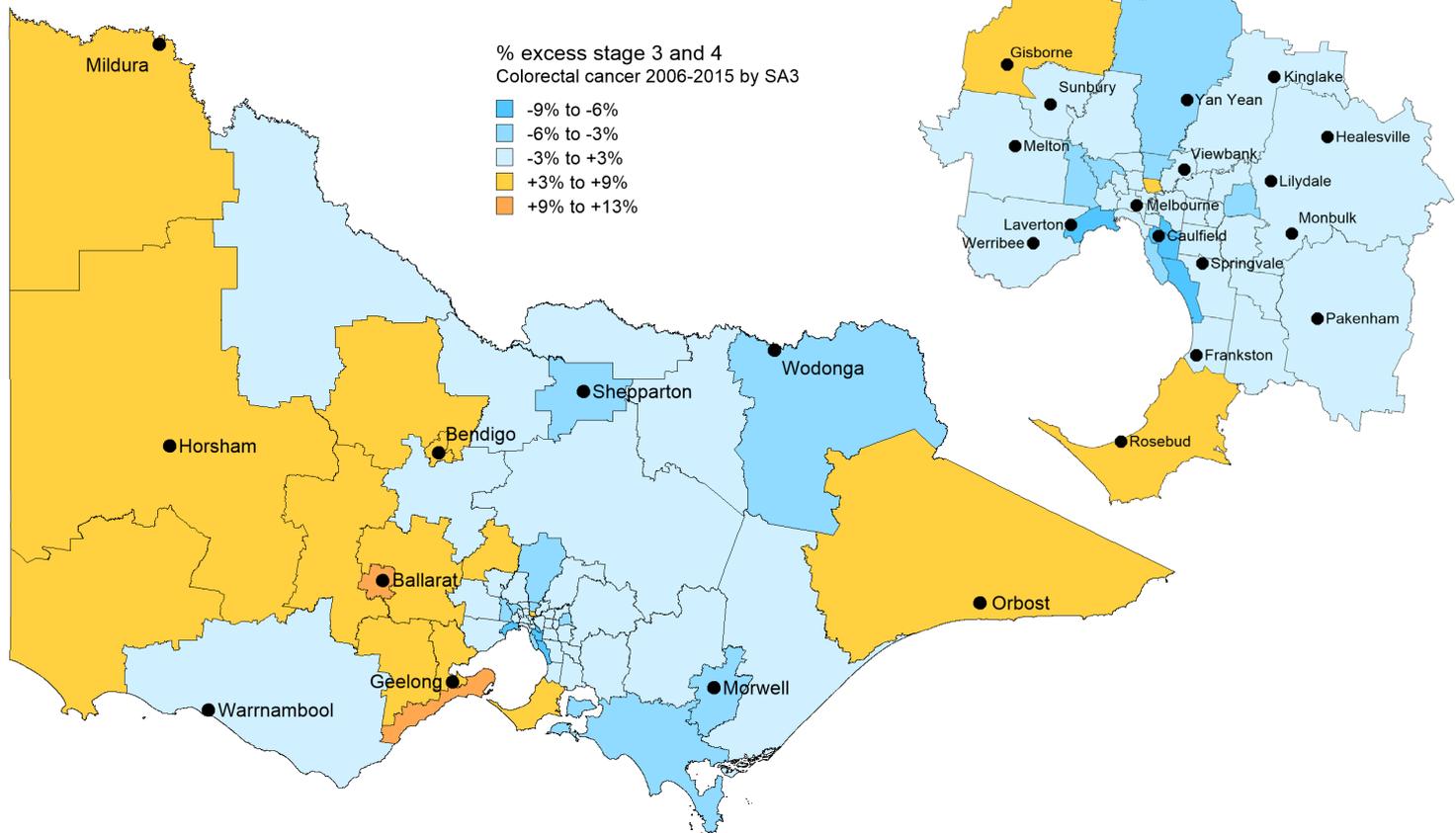
References and Notes:

1. Stage is RD-Stage as described in Cancer in Victoria: Statistics and Trends 2015
2. <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa>
3. [http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Australian+Statistical+Geography+Standard+\(ASGS\)](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Australian+Statistical+Geography+Standard+(ASGS))
4. % excess of late stage cancer=(observed proportion of late stage cancers in region - expected proportion based on State average)/(expected proportion based on State average) expressed as a percentage.

Bowel cancer stage by region

Though generally survival for early and late stage bowel cancer does not show significant differences between regions, the actual proportion of late stage cancer (in total incidence) does vary. Figure 3 shows the % excess of late stage cancer for each area (SA3 for the whole state and for metropolitan Melbourne)⁴ This comparison takes into account the age and sex distribution of each area as there is strong relationship between these factors and stage. The map highlights areas where there is an excess of late stage disease, these being predominantly in the western half of the state.

Figure 3: Relative excess of late stage bowel cancer, compared to state average, by SA3 regions³, Victoria and Melbourne Metropolitan area, 2006-2015.



For more information about Victorian cancer statistics:

www.cancervic.org.au/about-our-research/registry-statistics/statistics-data
www.cancervic.org.au/about-our-research/registry-statistics/cancer-in-victoria

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