

Victorian Cancer Registry

Cancer Facts



Cancer survivors in Victoria

Number 15 - May 2019

There is increasing interest in long-term survivors of cancer. As survival increases, so does the number of Victorians living for many years with a personal history of cancer. This has implications for the planning of health services to provide support.

[Cancer prevalence in Victoria - common cancers \(Cancer Facts 16, May 2019\)](#) provides estimates of ten-year prevalence for the most common cancers. Ten-year prevalence estimates the number of Victorians within the first ten years of their cancer journey, and is a commonly cited measure.

This fact sheet takes a longer term view and reports prevalence based on the whole 36-year period for which cancer incidence has been collected in Victoria. It provides the estimates of the number of Victorians who were alive on 1st January 2018 and who had a cancer diagnosis between 1982 and 2017 inclusive. These people are referred to here as “survivors”.

How many cancer survivors are there in Victoria?

There are over 290,000 Victorians who have a personal history of cancer. This means that 4.6% of Victorians, or 1 in 22 are cancer survivors. The majority of these people are living beyond cancer. Some however, will have been recently diagnosed and may be having initial cancer treatment, and others may be living with advanced cancer.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of all cancer survivors by their current age. Almost half (49%) of cancer survivors were aged over 70 years, and 22% of all Victorians aged over 70 years had a previous diagnosis of cancer (19.9% of those aged 70-79, 24.1% of those aged 80-89 and 26.2% of those over 90 years).

Table 2 shows a breakdown of these survivors by the age at which their cancer was diagnosed. Although their overall percentage is small, almost 4,000 cancer survivors had their cancer diagnosed before 15 years of age and over 12,000 people had their cancer diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 29 years. 22% of survivors were aged over 70 years at the time of their cancer diagnosis.

Figure 1 (over page) shows the number (and %) of survivors by the number of years since their cancer diagnosis. Note that these figures show only those with a diagnosis since 1982 - there will be more long-term survivors diagnosed prior to this date.

How many survivors are there for specific cancers?

Figure 2 (over page) shows the number of survivors by the most common types of cancer.

The number of survivors from a particular cancer reflects both how many people are diagnosed with the cancer and the effectiveness of treatment for this type of cancer.

In Victoria, the most prevalent groups of survivors are those with a history of breast cancer, prostate cancer, melanoma and bowel (colorectal) cancer.

- **1 in 22 (over 290,000) Victorians has a personal history of cancer**
- **The largest groups of survivors are those who have been diagnosed with breast, prostate or bowel cancer or melanoma**
- **Almost half (49%) of cancer survivors are aged over 70 years**

Table 1: Cancer survivors by current age

* % of all Victorians in each age group who have had a cancer diagnosis

Current age	Survivors	% of all Survivors	% of all Victorians*
Under 15	1,245	0.4%	0.1%
15-29	41,51	1.4%	0.3%
30-39	8,562	2.9%	0.9%
40-49	20,367	7.0%	2.4%
50-59	42,595	14.6%	5.6%
60-69	72,125	24.6%	11.5%
70-79	81,755	27.9%	19.9%
80-89	49,001	16.7%	24.1%
90+	12,867	4.4%	26.2%
Total	292,668	100.0%	4.6%

Table 2: Cancer survivors by age at diagnosis

Age at diagnosis	Survivors	% of survivors
Under 15	3,984	1.4%
15-29	12,221	4.2%
30-49	63,553	21.7%
50-69	147,624	50.4%
70+	65,286	22.3%
Total	292,668	100.0%

What are the issues experienced by survivors?

Health care needs vary across the cancer journey. People report different issues at the time of diagnosis, during active treatment, in the post-treatment survivorship phase, at the time of disease progression or recurrence, and towards the end-of-life.

Those whose cancer is in remission or has been cured may experience a broad range of issues in the post-treatment survivorship phase. These may result from the cancer itself as well as from their cancer treatments. Every person is different and even people treated with the same cancer, or with the same treatments, may report different issues.

Common issues reported by people after completing cancer treatments include:

- Varied reactions to finishing treatment**
 Some people feel a great sense of relief at the end of treatment whereas others may feel a sense of abandonment after the period of intense engagement with their treatment team.
- Persisting side effects from treatment**
 Many people feel ongoing side effects after treatment has finished. Fatigue is very common and may be long-lasting. There may be ongoing pain or discomfort, and changes in bodily functions.
- Side effects that develop later (“Late effects”)**
 Cancer treatments can cause damage to internal organs. Effects may be delayed and appear months or years later. Some people may be at risk of developing damage to the heart, lungs or bowel. Sometimes cancer treatment may increase the risk of developing another cancer.
- Impact on relationships and family**
 Having a cancer experience can alter relationships. Some relations strengthen whereas others can become strained. Family and friends are directly impacted by cancer and may also be at risk of psychological problems including anxiety and depression.
- Practical impacts**
 Treatments can make it hard to continue to work or study. After treatment, it can be challenging to resume these activities. Many people are financially disadvantaged during and after treatment.

Figure 1: Cancer survivors (and % of total) by years since diagnosis

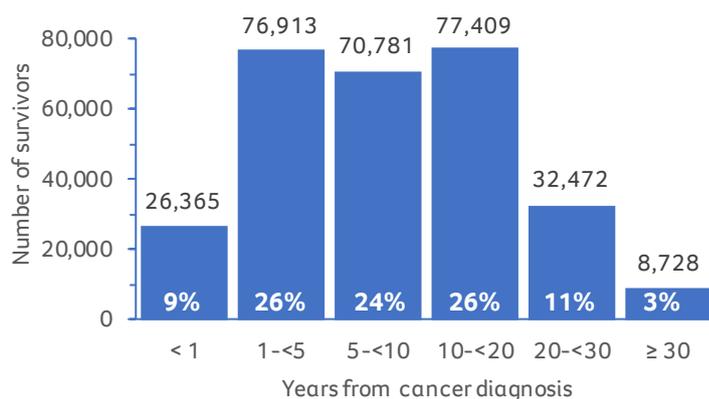
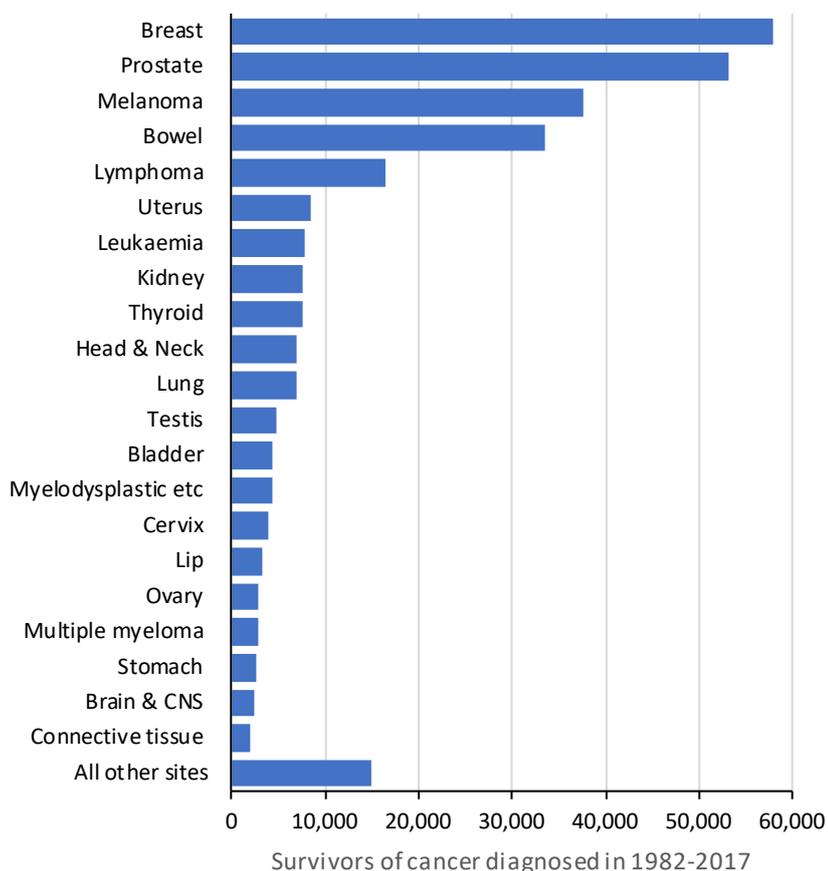


Figure 2: Survivors for the leading types of cancer - numbers of Victorians, with a personal history between 1982 and 2017, for each cancer type.

Myelodysplastic etc. = Myeloproliferative and myelodysplastic neoplasms



For information about Living Well after cancer, see <https://www.cancerciv.org.au/living-with-cancer/life-after-treatment/wellness-and-life-after-cancer>

For more information about Victorian cancer statistics:

www.cancerciv.org.au/research/registry-statistics/statistics-data
www.cancerciv.org.au/search/registry-statistics/?section=vcr-publications

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