

Victorian Cancer Registry

Cancer Facts

Number 8 - May 2016



Cancer in Aboriginal Victorians

Note: in this document we use the term Aboriginal Victorians to include also people of Torres Strait Island descent.

At the 2011 census, the number of Victorian Aboriginal people was 37,990, making up 0.7% of the Victorian total population and 7% of the national Aboriginal population.

Here we provide cancer statistics for Aboriginal Victorians people comparing them with those for non-Aboriginal Victorians.

How common is cancer in Aboriginal Victorians?

Note: cancer rates presented for Aboriginal Victorians are based on small numbers of cases, even when aggregated across the five year period 2010-2014. As a result, random fluctuations are to be expected across time periods and comparisons should be made with due consideration.

National figures are available from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - these provide a more robust overview of the cancer experience of Aboriginal Australians¹.

There were 562 cancer diagnoses reported for Aboriginal Victorians in the five-year period 2010-2014 inclusive, an average of 112 new diagnoses each year. Slightly more diagnoses were made for women (51%) than for men (49%).

Overall incidence rates tended to be higher for Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Victorians, but these differences were not statistically significant. For women, incidence rates were 314.8 and 280.1 new cases per 100,000 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians respectively, and for men, rates were 364.5 and 353.5 new cases per 100,000 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians respectively.

Which cancers are common in Aboriginal Victorians?

The most common cancers for Aboriginal Victorians are lung, bowel, breast, and prostate cancer, lymphoma, melanoma, head and neck cancers and uterus cancer.

Figure 1 shows the fifteen most common cancers, as a percentage of total cancers, for Aboriginal Victorians compared with non-Aboriginal Victorians.

Of the common cancers, rates were significantly higher for Aboriginal Victorians for cervical cancer and, for both men and women, lung cancer. Incidence rates were significantly lower for melanoma (women) and prostate cancer.

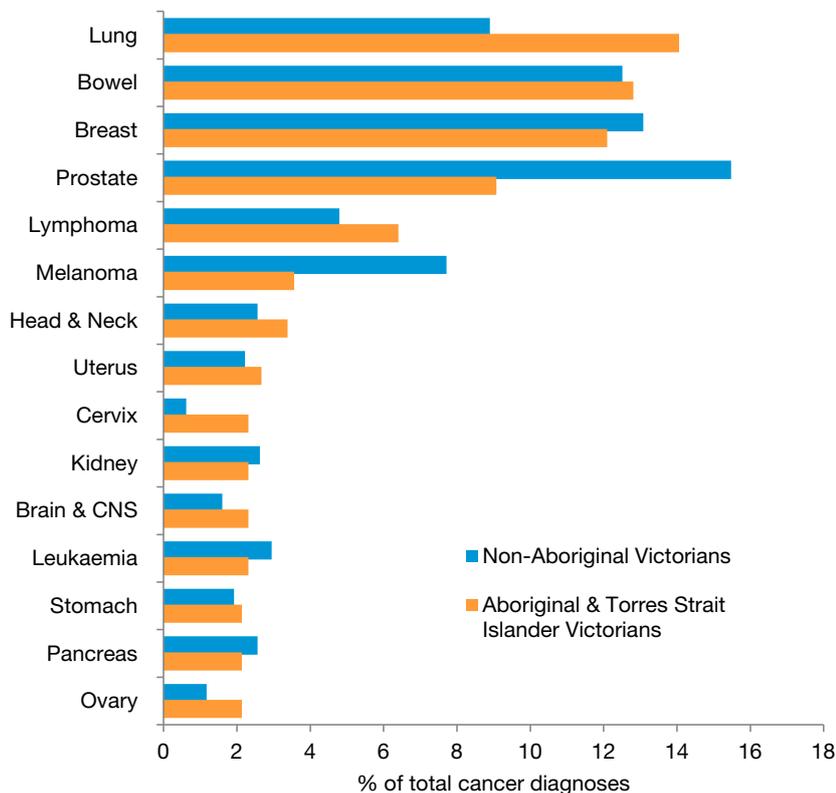


Figure 1: Most common types of cancer for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians, 2010-2014

For Aboriginal Victorians:

- There are over 110 new diagnoses of cancer each year
- There are an average of 50 cancer-related deaths each year
- Overall cancer incidence rates for both men and women do not differ significantly between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians
- Incidence rates are higher for lung cancer (men and women) and cervical cancer than for non-Aboriginal Victorians
- Incidence rates are lower for melanoma (women) and prostate cancer than for non-Aboriginal Victorians
- Mortality rates are significantly higher than for non-Aboriginal Victorians for both men and women

Cancer incidence by age group

Figure 2 shows age-specific incidence curves for Aboriginal men and women and non-Aboriginal men and women for the five year period 2010-2014. Incidence rates for Victorian Aboriginal men and non-Aboriginal men are similar until over 70 years of age, whereas for Aboriginal women, incidence rates start to exceed those of non-Aboriginal women from the 40-49 years age group and are consistently 20-30% higher for older age groups.

What are the outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians with cancer?

There were 250 cancer deaths of Aboriginal Victorians in the five years 2010-2014, an average of 50 deaths each year. Deaths was slightly higher for men (52%) than for women (48%).

Overall mortality rates were significantly higher for both Aboriginal men and women (191.1 and 135.3 deaths per 100,000, respectively) than for non-Aboriginal men and women (111.6 and 77.3 deaths per 100,000 men and women, respectively).

National figures showed that five-year survival was 40% for Aboriginal diagnosed with cancer between 1999 and 2007, which was lower than non-Aboriginal Australians (52%)¹.

Why do rates differ for some cancers between Aboriginal peoples and other Victorians?

The cancers for which Aboriginal Victorians have relatively higher incidence rates, compared with non-Aboriginal Victorians, are associated mostly with lifestyle risk factors (Figure 1 previous page).

The greater mortality rates experienced by Aboriginal Victorians

may be associated with diagnoses occurring at more advanced disease stage. This could reflect problems around timely access to treatment and lower participation in cancer screening services.

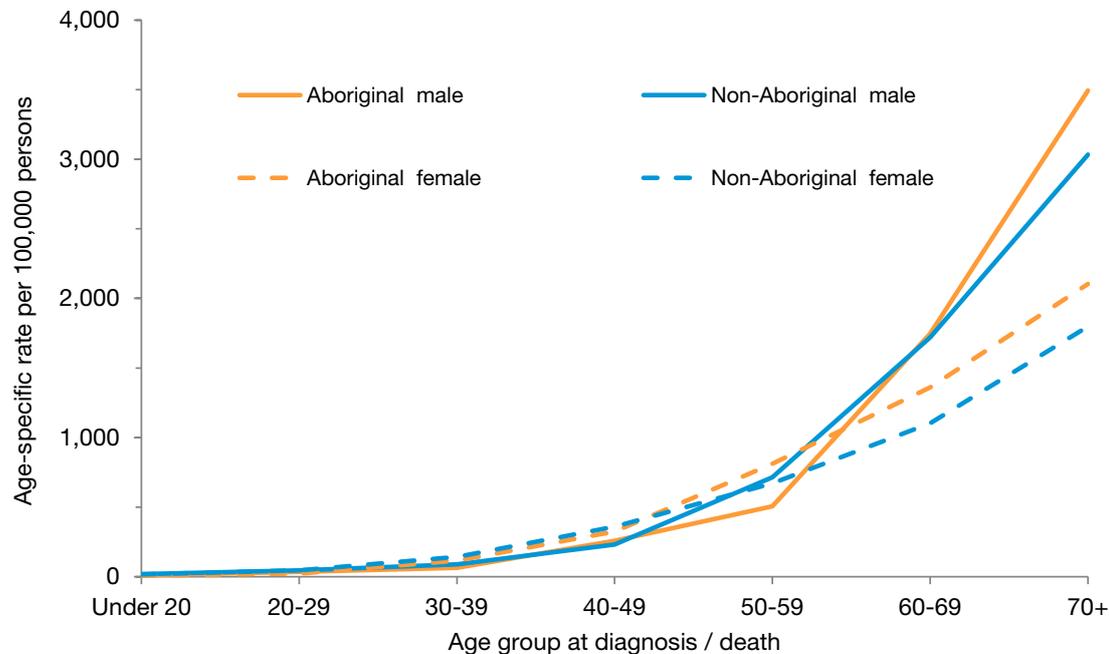
What do we know about the causes of cancer for Aboriginal peoples?

The cancers for which Aboriginal Victorians have higher incidence rates, compared with non-Aboriginal Victorians, largely reflect higher prevalence of cancer-related modifiable risk factors¹ such as:

- Cervical cancer: A contributing factor to the higher rates in Aboriginal women could be higher prevalence of HPV infection and lower rates of cervical screening.
- Lung cancer: The prevalence of smoking among Aboriginal Australians is higher than for non-Aboriginal Australians (38% compared with 18%).
- Breast cancer in females: Aboriginal women experience a poorer prognosis which could be at least partly explained by the lower participation in breast cancer screening (36%) than by non-Aboriginal females (54%).
- Liver cancer: This population group experiences higher rates of risky alcohol consumption and higher prevalence of hepatitis B infection.

Reference: 1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Cancer Australia 2013. Cancer in Aboriginal peoples of Australia: an overview. Cancer series no.78. Cat. no. CAN 75. Canberra: AIHW.

Figure 2: Age-specific cancer incidence rates by sex for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians, 2010-2014



For more information about Victorian cancer statistics:

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

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