

Victorian Cancer Registry

Cancer Facts

Number 9 - June 2017



Cancer survivors in Victoria

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, August 2013) provided estimates of ten-year prevalence for the most common cancers. Ten-year prevalence estimates the numbers 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 34-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 2016 and who had a cancer diagnosis between 1982 and 2015 inclusive. These people are referred to here as “survivors”.

How many cancer survivors are there in Victoria?

There are over 265,000 Victorians who have a personal history of cancer. This means that 4.5% 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. Over half (52%) of cancer survivors were aged over 70 years, and 22% of all Victorians aged over 70 years had a previous diagnosis of cancer (19.8% of those aged 70-79, 24.8% of those aged 80-89 and 32.6% 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, over 3,600 cancer survivors had their cancer diagnosed before 15 years of age and over 11,000 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.

How many survivors are there for specific cancers?

Figure 1 (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, breast cancer, prostate cancer, melanoma and bowel cancer have the greatest numbers of survivors.

- 1 in 22 (nearly 265,000) 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
- Over half (52%) of cancer survivors are aged over 70 years

Table 1: Cancer survivors by current age

Current age	Survivors	% of all survivors	% of all Victorians
Under 15	995	0.4%	0.1%
15-29	3,396	1.3%	0.3%
30-39	7,008	2.6%	0.8%
40-49	17,158	6.5%	2.1%
50-59	36,567	13.8%	5.0%
60-69	63,154	23.9%	10.6%
70-79	73,566	27.8%	19.8%
80-89	48,708	18.4%	24.8%
90+	14,179	5.4%	32.6%
Total	264,731	100.0%	4.5%

Table 2: Cancer survivors by age at diagnosis

Age at diagnosis	Survivors	% of survivors
Under 15	3,651	1.4%
15-29	11,312	4.3%
30-49	58,363	22.0%
50-69	133,764	50.5%
70+	57,641	21.8%
Total	264,731	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.

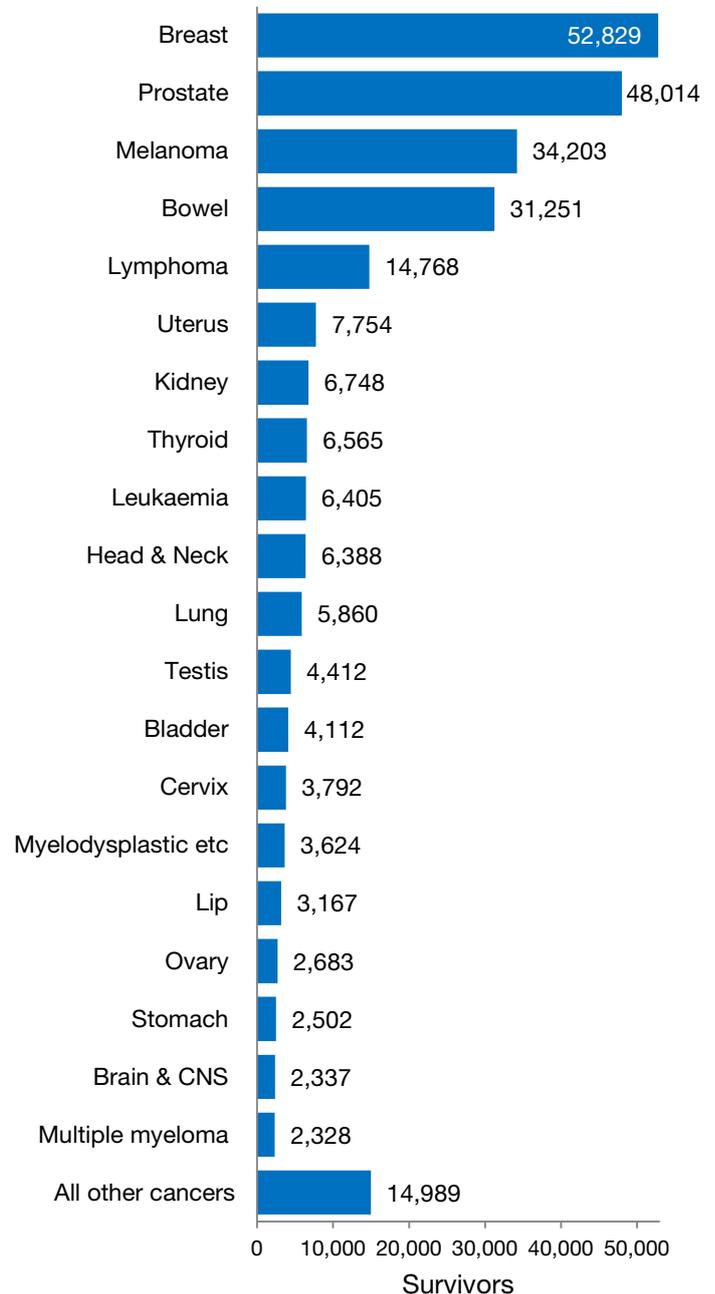
Those whose cancer is in remission or has been cured may experience a broad range of issues in the post-treatment survivorship phase. These may result from the cancer itself as well as from their cancer treatments. Every person is different and even people treated with the same cancer, or with the same 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: Survivors for the leading types of cancer - numbers of Victorians, with a personal history between 1982 and 2015, for each cancer type.

MPD & MDS=Myeloproliferative and myelodysplastic neoplasms



Reference: Cancer Council Victoria website - <http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/survivors/>

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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