



Media Release

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Regional cancer centres needed to reduce ongoing inequity in cancer care outcomes

New research showing the further someone lives from a city the sooner they die after being diagnosed with cancer adds urgency to the need for rural cancer services reform, two leading non-government cancer organisations said today.

Cancer Council Australia Chief Executive Officer, Professor Ian Olver, and President of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia, Professor David Goldstein, said the findings of a new government report¹ on cancer survival are a timely reminder that the current national health reform agenda needs to include improving regional access to cancer services as a priority.

“The findings show that Australia is doing comparatively well in treating cancer, but the outcomes are progressively poorer as distance from the city increases,” Professor Olver said.

“Around 57 per cent of people in outer regional areas are still alive five years after a cancer diagnosis, compared with the national average of around 61 per cent – a four per cent gap that translates to hundreds of individuals dying prematurely over a five-year period.

“The outcomes are considerably poorer for people in more remote areas, whose survival rates are around eight per cent lower than the national average.”

Professor Goldstein said statistics alone did not reflect the difficulties endured by people who had to travel for hours to receive treatment or who chose sub-optimal care because they could not abandon their businesses and families to spend lengthy periods in the city.

“The most effective way to reduce the prohibitive distances faced by cancer patients in rural and remote areas is to bring services to the regions, by establishing a network of regional cancer centres,” he said.

“Located where the need is highest, a network of multidisciplinary cancer centres could treat thousands of patients in outer regional and remote areas, dramatically reducing the distance hundreds of patients would need to travel each year and easing pressure on metropolitan centres that currently care for rural and remote patients.”

Professor Olver and Professor Goldstein said setting up cancer centres in key regional locations would also make services more accessible to Indigenous Australians in rural and remote areas, who have some of the worst cancer treatment outcomes of any population group in the nation.

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¹ Cancer survival and prevalence in Australia: report commissioned by Cancer Australia, prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare