

Optimal Care for Older People with Cancer

The vast majority of people diagnosed with cancer in Australia are older adults, yet till now there has been no standardised pathway for providing optimal care to this population. The new 'Optimal Care Pathway (OCP) for older people with cancer' maps the journey of an older person with cancer in Australia with a focus on providing tailored and person-centred care that is consistent, safe, high-quality, and evidenced based.

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) developed the OCP with funding from Cancer Australia. The OCP is a key component of the Australian Cancer Plan which aims to improve health equity for older Australians, recognising that ageism and comorbidities are often barriers to people receiving the most appropriate care.

Professor Meera Agar and A/Professor Christopher Steer led the multidisciplinary OCP working group of national leaders in cancer care – including members of COSA's Geriatric Oncology Group – and consumer representatives.

A/Professor Steer said, "We designed the pathway around the 4Ms of age-friendly health systems considering what matters to the patient as well as addressing medicines usage, mentation or cognitive issues, and patient mobility. This is a global first and we are proud to lead the way in Australia."

"Best practice care for an older person with cancer should include a geriatric assessment as well as an assessment of their cancer. We know providing optimal cancer care is about balancing effective treatment with maintaining function, quality of life, and autonomy, and most importantly addressing what matters most to the patient. The pathway takes into account the patient's goals, priorities and ability to cope with different treatments."

In a recent address to the COSA-IPOS 2025 meeting in Adelaide, Minister for Health, Disability and Ageing, Mark Butler MP, thanked everyone involved in the OCP development.

Minister Butler said, "Older people are more likely to develop cancer but less likely to get the best care and are often not consulted about their treatment. That is simply not acceptable."

He said, "All Australians deserve the best care, regardless of their age or their circumstances, and this pathway sets a benchmark for health services and professionals."

Professor Dorothy Keefe, Cancer Australia CEO welcomed the launch of the new OCP.

Professor Keefe said, “The Optimal Care Pathway for older people with cancer is a crucial step towards improving health equity for older Australians, ensuring care is evidence-based, respectful, and responsive to their needs.”

“Health professionals and health services are encouraged to adopt the Optimal Care Pathway to deliver consistent, high-quality care for older Australians with cancer. Together, we can raise the national standard of cancer care and help achieve world-class, equitable outcomes across all communities.”

The OCP is comprised of a 158-page booklet and *Quick Reference Guide* for healthcare providers, and a *Guide to best cancer care* for older people with cancer and their carers, families and friends. The consumer guide is available in 11 languages, downloadable as PDFs or audio recordings.

The OCP and guides are available on the Cancer Council Australia website:

- [Optimal care pathway for older people with cancer](#)
- [Quick reference guide](#)
- [Consumer guides](#)

Support for implementation will be vital to ensure healthcare providers and consumers can apply the pathway principles in everyday practice to optimise care for older people with cancer.

Media Enquiries

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About COSA

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) is Australia’s peak multidisciplinary society bringing together health professionals across all cancers to advance care and improve outcomes. COSA is recognised as an activist organisation whose views are valued in all aspects of cancer care. We are allied with and provide high-level clinical advice to Cancer Council Australia.

Learn more about COSA and COSA’s Geriatric Oncology Group

<https://www.cosa.org.au/groups/geriatric-oncology/>.

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