



Media Release

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Almost half of cancer patients in regional NSW struggle accessing treatment because of where they live, survey finds

Cancer Council NSW is calling for better access to cancer treatment and care for people living in regional NSW, with evidence clearly demonstrating that the chance of dying from cancer increases the further patients are from major centres.

These views have been shared in a Cancer Council NSW submission, which was published today, to a parliamentary inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional, and remote NSW.

The charity's Director of Cancer Information and Support, Annie Miller says, "The inquiry gives us the opportunity to find ways to help ensure that no matter who you are, or where you live, every person in NSW can access the best possible cancer care when they need it.

"As the state's leading cancer charity with a network of more than 2,400 volunteers across NSW and through our work providing support to people affected by cancer, we hear hundreds of real stories from real people about their cancer experiences and challenges living in regional and remote NSW.

Cancer Council NSW's submission looks at the evidence of health disparities across the state and gives voice to the 349 people who responded to a recent survey of regional communities. The survey found that distance to care is the most significant barrier to accessing cancer care, closely followed by long wait times.

Nearly 80% of people living in regional NSW are concerned that where they live will affect their chances of surviving cancer, and two thirds of people living in regional NSW are concerned that where they live can affect the quality of care they receive.

Sarah Armstrong, who lives in Melbourne, completed Cancer Council NSW's survey because she felt it was important for the Inquiry to hear about her family's experience of care in regional NSW. Her father lived in Coolamon and was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer in 2016. She says that while she doesn't expect people living in regional and rural areas to receive the same type of services as those living in metro areas, she believes small improvements could have made the experience better.

"There were no telehealth options available, meaning we needed to drive to 5-6 hours to Sydney for one scan or appointment," she says.

"Numerous times he was asked to travel to Sydney within 24-48 hours which then meant my mum had to find and book her own accommodation, which was very expensive. In my personal opinion, the biggest thing that is lacking in regional areas is the at home care, my Dad was over 6 ft tall and a larger man, and my Mum had to care for him herself. This meant lifting him in and out of bed and chairs, helping him shower go to the toilet etc, and there was no support on offer for her during this time."



Ms Miller says that Sarah's story highlights how achievable changes can be made to improve access to quality care for cancer patients living in regional and remote NSW.

"Cancer outcomes in NSW are among the best in the world, yet outcomes remain poor for people living in rural and remote NSW compared to people living in metropolitan areas. Evidence clearly demonstrates that the chance of dying from cancer increases with distance from major centres," she says.

"These disparities in cancer outcomes are, in part, due to people in regional areas having poorer access to high-quality cancer care. People in regional areas also have higher rates of cancer risk factors such as smoking and are also more likely to be diagnosed with low survival cancers."

"This inquiry is an opportunity to comprehensively investigate inequalities in health and will hopefully lead to important system changes. We know that while our health system is one of the best in the world, inequalities remain. However, where you live should not mean you receive poorer quality of care or have poorer health outcomes."

If you or someone you know has been impacted by cancer and needs support, call Cancer Council's 13 11 20 Information and Support line.

-ENDS-

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Notes to editor:

Cancer Council NSW has made 12 recommendations to close the health divide between regional and metropolitan NSW, including:

- ensuring people with cancer in regional NSW have access to best possible care when they need it
- improving coordination of care and help people with cancer navigate their treatment
- ensuring that transport to treatment and accommodation assistance puts the needs of patients and their families at the centre
- enhancing access to care via telehealth.

View the full Cancer Council NSW submission and recommendation here [\[link\]](#)

About Cancer Council

Cancer Council is Australia's leading cancer charity working across every aspect of every cancer. Every day, we support families affected by cancer when they need it most, speak out on behalf of the community on cancer issues, empower people to reduce their cancer risk, and find new ways to better detect and treat cancer. With your help, we're getting closer to a cancer free future every minute, every hour, every day.