

Here for Change

Cancer Council NSW's 2023 Election Priorities



**Cancer
Council**
NSW

Contents



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respects to the elders past and present and extend that respect to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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1 in 2 people will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime.

CEO message

On 25 March 2023, we are being asked to think about what we want to see for the future of our families, our communities and our state.

The 2023 election comes at a time when communities across our state face exceptional challenges and many of the services and supports that communities rely on are under enormous strain.

We can reflect with great pride on a health system that withstood the toughest of times. Our health system and the dedicated people who work within it, have seen us through a health crisis, like none other in our lifetime.

We can also take great pride in how communities came together and did what they needed to do to protect the health of many others.

As we look ahead with hope, at the opportunities the future brings, we will continue to face significant and ongoing health challenges.

With around one in two people expected to be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, cancer touches every family in NSW.

Our research predicts that over the next 25 years, around 1.52 million people in NSW will be diagnosed with cancer and 1 in 3 people diagnosed will die.

But it's within our power to change this.

There is no doubt we have achieved much from past investments in cancer research, prevention, and care. Cancer survival has improved by almost 40% over

the past 30 years. However, inequities in outcomes by cancer type and population groups have widened and a growing cancer survivor population requires supportive care.

It's time to refocus our efforts and do what we know works to prevent, detect, and treat cancers and support people to live well following a cancer diagnosis.

In the pages ahead we detail what needs to be done in the next term of government to support cancer prevention, early detection and people's health and wellbeing after diagnosis and treatment. Cancer Council NSW's comprehensive policy proposals are built on emerging evidence and the strong cancer control foundations in our health system. We have prioritised interventions that can reduce the impact of cancer across the population and support people living with cancer to have a higher quality of life.

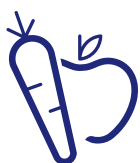
If we invest in cancer control today, we can save many thousands of lives and give many thousands more, many more of life's precious moments.

We're committed to our vision of a cancer free future and we're calling on the next NSW Government to join us – to be Here for Change.

Sincerely
Professor Sarah Hosking
Chief Executive Officer

Cancer Council NSW's 2023 election priorities at a glance:

We're calling on the next NSW Government to protect life's moments and commit to being Here for Change by:



Increasing investment in cancer prevention so more people can live a cancer free life by:

- Investing \$24 million over three years for Cancer Council NSW to deliver a public education campaign to increase awareness of Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) updated alcohol guidelines and reduce risky drinking in the community.
- Protecting children and young people from nicotine addiction and the risk of smoking uptake by making it an offence to supply or sell non-nicotine e-cigarette products.
- Reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing by removing unhealthy food advertising on state owned or controlled property, starting with public transport.
- Investing \$8 million each year to deliver a healthy eating campaign, focusing on fruit and vegetable consumption. The campaign should include additional support for the community to eat a nutritious diet consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, such as a fruit and vegetable voucher scheme for low income families experiencing rising cost of living pressures.



Improving early detection and diagnosis of bowel cancer so more lives can be saved by:

- Investing \$8 million each year to deliver a sustained bowel cancer screening mass media campaign and communications strategy, with an additional \$2 million each year for tailored communication strategies for under screened populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Setting a NSW target to reach and sustain 60% participation in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program by 2025.
- Increasing funding to expand colonoscopy services to cut wait times for colonoscopy from referral following a positive bowel screening test to 30 days.
- Publishing wait times for colonoscopy in public hospitals to improve transparency.
- Increasing funding to implement direct access colonoscopy pathways to ensure that everyone who returns a positive bowel screening test can direct access colonoscopy where appropriate.



“As a two-time breast cancer survivor, I feel lucky to draw breath every day. Before my diagnosis I neglected my health and wellbeing; eating badly, not exercising, working long hours, and consuming alcohol at levels that, I now know, would be considered high risk. It goes without saying that my family’s health is a high priority for me, and I have open conversations with my three daughters around health and wellbeing and especially around reducing drinking to reduce risk.”

Ros English, Central Coast NSW

Photographed on Darkinjung Country



Introducing the highest standard of cancer care so people receive the best possible care, no matter who they are or where they live by:

- Developing a plan in the first year of government to fully embed and enable all Local Health Districts to implement the Optimal Care Pathways for all cancer types by 2028.
- Setting benchmarks for optimal cancer care and publicly report on cancer outcomes and how the NSW health system performs against benchmarks.
- Committing to ensure that everyone being treated for cancer has their care reviewed by a multidisciplinary team where appropriate.
- Committing to ensure all cancer patients receive a specialist review, tests, and start treatment within the recommended timeframes.
- Working with Primary Health Networks to ensure Optimal Care Pathways are embedded in HealthPathways and medical practice software.

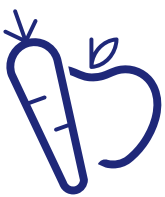


Supporting people to live well during and after cancer treatment so they can have a higher quality of life by:

- Establishing and funding a NSW cancer survivorship framework based on the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) survivorship model by 2025.
- Ensuring people being treated for cancer receive a needs assessment from their healthcare team and receive an appropriate care plan.
- Embedding referral pathways that encourage health care providers to refer to appropriate supportive care including services provided by Cancer Council NSW.
- Working with the Australian Government to ensure that primary care providers are supported to provide survivorship care.

Increase investment in cancer prevention

Over the next 25 years, our research predicts that around 1.52 million people in NSW will be diagnosed with cancer and unless something changes, almost 1 in 3 people diagnosed will die. With unprecedented growth in new cancer cases, it has never been more important to do more of what we know works to prevent, detect, and treat cancers and support people with cancer to live well.



Our research has shown that investing in cancer prevention works and can save many thousands of lives over the next two decades. However, Government spending on prevention has fallen behind. The NSW Government spends less than one third of what is recommended on disease prevention and chronic conditions such as obesity remain stubbornly high.

Cancer Council NSW recommendations:

1

Reduce risky drinking in the community

Invest \$24 million over three years for Cancer Council NSW to deliver a public education campaign to increase awareness of Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) updated alcohol guidelines and reduce risky drinking in the community.

2

Protect young people from nicotine addiction

Protect children and young people from nicotine addiction and risk of smoking uptake by making it an offence to supply or sell non-nicotine e-cigarette products.

3

Reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing

Reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing by removing unhealthy food advertising on state owned or controlled property, starting with public transport.

4

Support people to eat healthy

Invest \$8 million each year to deliver a healthy eating campaign, focusing on fruit and vegetable consumption. The campaign should include additional support for the community to eat a nutritious diet consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, such as a fruit and vegetable voucher scheme for low-income families experiencing rising cost of living pressures.



1

Reduce risky drinking in the community

Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

Alcohol use is a cause of seven types of cancer¹ and was associated with close to 3,500 cancer cases (or 2.8% of all cancers) in Australia in 2013². Concerningly, over a third of adults in NSW drink alcohol at levels that put them at risk of long-term harm and these levels have been increasing steadily since 2015³.

Despite the strong link between alcohol use and cancer, Cancer Council NSW research has shown that more than 40% of NSW adults are unaware that alcohol is a cause of cancer^{4, 5}.

In addition to low community awareness of alcohol as a cause of cancer, knowledge of the Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol⁶ is also low^{7, 8}. Informing people about what level of alcohol use puts them at risk of long-term harm is the first step to supporting people to improve their health and wellbeing.

What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

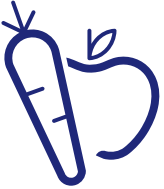
Well-funded and sustained campaigns that include traditional mass media and social media have been shown to improve knowledge, awareness and attitudes relating to alcohol use^{9, 10}. Australian research has shown that including the drinking guidelines in campaigns increased the proportion of people who could correctly state the guidelines as well as prompt changes in attitudes towards drinking¹¹.

In 2022, Cancer Council NSW delivered a digital social marketing campaign to improve awareness of the link between drinking alcohol and increased cancer risk, and attitudes towards reducing alcohol use. People who had seen the campaign were significantly more likely to believe they should and would reduce their drinking compared with those who had not seen it.

Public education campaigns are recommended by the World Health Organization to address the health issues associated with alcohol¹². Investing in a sustained social marketing campaign would improve knowledge of NHMRC alcohol guidelines, raise awareness of the long-term harms caused by alcohol use (including cancer), improve attitudes to reducing alcohol use and support behaviour change.

2

Protect young people from nicotine addiction



Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

Daily and regular use of e-cigarettes among 16-24 year olds has more than doubled in recent years from 4.5% to 11% in 2020/21¹³.

In late September, the first report from the Generation Vape research project was published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health. The Cancer Council NSW led study, funded by the NSW Government found one third of NSW teenagers surveyed had vaped. Of them, four out of five described getting hold of vapes illegally as “easy”, through a mix of multiple interrelated channels, including retail¹⁴.

E-cigarettes are addicting a new generation of young people to nicotine and risk of smoking uptake - the biggest preventable cause of cancer. Many e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is a dangerous and highly addictive poison that causes harm to developing brains. Even e-cigarettes not labelled as containing nicotine have been found to contain nicotine.

Research on the health impacts of e-cigarettes shows¹⁵ **e-cigarette users are three times as likely as non-users to take up smoking.**

It also found that e-cigarettes cause direct health harms, including poisoning, seizures, burns and lung disease.

The current laws restricting access to nicotine e-cigarettes as a prescription only quit smoking aid are not working and teenagers and young people are easily accessing illegal nicotine e-cigarettes at alarming rates. If action is not taken to curb e-cigarette use among young people, we risk addicting a new generation of smokers and undoing the health gains achieved through effective NSW tobacco control over many decades.

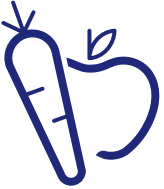
What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

By taking the next steps to protect the health of our young people by phasing out the retail sale of non-nicotine e-cigarettes, the NSW Government can effectively enforce the current laws and act on the alarming rates of young people illegally accessing nicotine e-cigarettes.

Through demonstrating leadership, the NSW Government can call on the Australian Government to immediately strengthen its enforcement action to intercept the illegal importation of vaping products into Australia.

3

Reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing



Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

Overweight and obesity is linked to 13 different types of cancer, including post-menopausal breast, endometrial, oesophageal, bowel, kidney, liver, and pancreatic cancer¹⁶.

The rate of obesity-related cancers in Australia almost quadrupled between 1983 and 2017¹⁷.

In NSW, almost one in four children are still living with overweight or obesity¹⁸. Many of those children will go on to carry that excess weight into adulthood¹⁹, increasing their risk of developing chronic health conditions. Yet, no progress has been made to reduce overweight and obesity and we must do more to support people to have healthier lives.

Children's exposure to food marketing influences their food and food brand knowledge, preferences, behaviours and in turn, their weight and health outcomes^{20, 21}. Cancer Council NSW research has shown that 83% of food advertisements at major train stations and on buses were for unhealthy foods²².

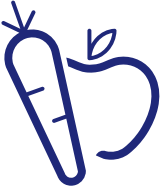
The 2022 Cancer Council NSW Cancer Prevention survey²³ showed that 71% of NSW residents are concerned about outdoor advertisements, such as billboards and posters, for unhealthy foods. In 2022, the majority of the community (70%), supported restrictions on unhealthy food advertising that targets children and 60% indicated support for restrictions on unhealthy food and drink advertising on government-owned property²³.

What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

Reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing is recommended by both the World Cancer Research Fund and the World Health Organization as a cost-effective wide-reaching obesity prevention strategy. International examples of restrictions on unhealthy food advertising also show promising results. Analysis of the 2019 Transport for London unhealthy food advertising restrictions has found that the policy resulted in a reduction in weekly household purchases of unhealthy foods²⁴. Modelling has shown this could result in 94,867 fewer cases of obesity and is likely to have the biggest impact on socio-economic disadvantaged groups²⁵.

4

Support people to eat healthy



Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

Inadequate fruit, vegetable and fibre intake and high intake of red and processed meat is linked to 6,700 cancer cases a year in Australia^{2,26}. Poor diet also contributes to excess weight gain, with overweight and obesity linked with 13 different types of cancer and an estimated 5,300 cancer cases in Australia each year². In NSW in 2019-2020, only 5.2% of children aged 2-15 years ate the recommended daily intake of vegetables²⁷. For adults the 2020 results show only 5.9% of adults ate the recommended daily intake of vegetables and 37.5% ate one serve or less of vegetables each day¹³.

Cancer Council NSW research with the NSW community found that when it comes to fruit and vegetable consumption, many participants perceived their intake was adequate despite not meeting the recommendations, with over half of those not meeting the guidelines for vegetables saying they thought they were eating enough²⁸.

What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

Mass media campaigns can contribute to healthy behaviour change, including healthy eating¹⁰. The Australian fruit and vegetable campaign, *Go for 2&5* was successful in improving knowledge of the recommended daily serves^{29,30} and consumption of fruit and vegetables³¹. The LiveLighter campaign is a mass media healthy weight campaign that has been delivered in Western Australia since 2012. It has been extensively evaluated and demonstrated to have positive impact translating improvements in awareness into behaviour change related to healthy eating and physical activity³².

Price incentives, such as subsidising fruit and vegetables to improve their affordability, particularly in regional and remote areas, should be used to support a public awareness campaign³³. Cancer Council NSW recommends exploring a fruit and vegetable voucher scheme to address rising costs of fresh produce and encourage the consumption of fruit and vegetables. The fruit and vegetable voucher scheme should be co-designed with NSW families experiencing financial hardship or where high prices of fruit and vegetables is a barrier to increasing consumption. This would ensure a scheme that works to address the unique challenges and needs faced by different priority communities.



Improve early detection and diagnosis of bowel cancer

Bowel cancer is the second highest cause of cancer death in NSW and is responsible for around 35 deaths every week³⁴. Our research predicts that, unless there is a major shift towards more cases detected at an early stage, almost 150,000 Australians will die of bowel cancer over the next 25 years³⁵ – a third will be from NSW.



Early detection and diagnosis is key to surviving a bowel cancer diagnosis. Thousands of lives can be saved over the next twenty years by encouraging more people in NSW to participate in the bowel cancer screening program. Cancer Council NSW calls on the next NSW Government to do more to increase awareness and participation in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) and cut wait times for colonoscopy to the recommended 30 days. This will ensure people with bowel cancer are diagnosed as early as possible and have the best chance of survival.

Cancer Council NSW recommendations:

- 1** Invest \$8 million each year to deliver a sustained bowel cancer screening mass media campaign and communications strategy, with an additional \$2 million each year for tailored communication for under screened populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- 2** Set a NSW target to reach and sustain 60% participation in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program by 2025.

- 3** Increase funding to expand colonoscopy services to cut wait times for colonoscopy from referral following a positive bowel screening test to 30 days.

- 4** Publish wait times for colonoscopy in public hospitals to improve transparency.

- 5** Increase funding to implement direct access colonoscopy pathways to ensure that everyone who returns a positive bowel screening test can direct access colonoscopy where appropriate.



Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

Unfortunately, bowel cancer screening participation rates in NSW remain one of the lowest in the country with participation stalled at 39.3% compared to 44.6% in Victoria³⁶. Every year in NSW, fewer than 1 in 2 people sent a bowel screening test kit will do the test. We know that survival for bowel cancer depends on the stage of cancer at diagnosis. Participation in bowel cancer screening is essential for early diagnosis, where bowel cancer can be successfully treated³⁷.

NSW has some of the longest waiting times in Australia for follow-up colonoscopy. Only 12% of people receive a colonoscopy following a positive bowel cancer screening test within the recommended 30 days³⁸.

We know that campaigns encouraging participation in bowel cancer screening work. The National Bowel Cancer Screening Campaign delivered by Cancer Council Australia in 2019 was directly responsible for an additional 93,000 test kit returns. On top of this, it will also save \$46 million in direct healthcare costs from 2019 to 2070, delivering a huge return on investment. This means more money can be spent on preventative health measures.

What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

Sustained 60% participation in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program could save up to 28,000 lives in NSW over the next 25 or so years³⁹.

Bowel cancer is the most expensive cancer to treat in Australia with the majority of expenditure for hospital treatment. Research by The Daffodil Centre shows the average health costs for a bowel (colorectal) cancer case in the first year of treatment are over \$50,000⁴⁰. Our research shows that bowel cancer screening is a cost-effective intervention⁴¹. Increasing participation in the NBCSP and treating bowel cancers earlier will save lives and reduce the demands on our hospitals.



“I have two daughters and three grandchildren. I completed a bowel cancer screening test to give my family peace-of-mind. Taking the test could save my life. Talking about it and sharing my experience can save other people’s lives.”

Simone Jordan, Hunter NSW

Image source: Cancer Council Australia

Introduce **higher standards of care** for everyone with cancer

Despite a world-class health system, cancer control outcomes in NSW vary depending on where you live⁴². Optimal Care Pathways provide guidance to health professionals on the best possible care for people with specific cancer types. They can help to reduce inequities in treatment as well as improve a range of outcomes for people living with cancer.



Optimal Care Pathways are endorsed by all Australian governments as the standard of cancer care – yet NSW has no dedicated plan for embedding them across the health system and is falling behind other states and territories.

Cancer Council NSW calls on the next NSW Government to formally adopt the Optimal Care Pathways so everyone can access and know they are receiving the highest standards of care.

Cancer Council NSW recommendations:

1

Develop a plan in the first year of Government to fully embed and enable all Local Health Districts to implement the Optimal Care Pathways for all cancer types by 2028.

2

Set benchmarks for optimal cancer care and publicly report on cancer outcomes and how the NSW health system performs against benchmarks.

3

Commit to ensure that everyone being treated for cancer has their care reviewed by a multidisciplinary team where appropriate.

4

Commit to ensure all cancer patients receive specialist review, tests, and start treatment within the recommended timeframes.

5

Work with Primary Health Networks to ensure Optimal Care Pathways are embedded in HealthPathways and medical practice software.



“I got frustrated with it, and I didn’t like it at all, but I didn’t waste energy on things that weren’t going to nurture me. I allowed myself to be angry when I needed to. I cried, really cried and allowed everything to come up. I allowed myself to grieve, it changes your life forever.”

Annie Miller, Woolloomooloo, NSW

Photographed on Eora Country



Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

By world-standards, NSW has excellent cancer outcomes – but not for everyone.

Whilst there can be a number of reasons for this variation, measuring these differences and understanding why they occur is crucial to identify improvements in cancer outcomes across the state⁴².

We know that access to high quality cancer care can depend on where you live. For example, people with cancer in regional areas experience poorer access to cancer care contributing to regional-metropolitan disparities in cancer outcomes⁴³. Our Regional Communities Cancer survey found that wait times are one of the most significant barriers to accessing cancer care in regional areas, second only to distance. **One of our recent studies showed less than half of people with lung cancer across Australia start treatment within the recommended timeframe after specialist review.** There is currently no public reporting of wait times to access cancer specialist appointments, tests, and treatments in NSW, meaning people with cancer have no idea whether they are waiting too long to get care.

Cancer mortality and other measures vary from one Local Health District or hospital to another⁴².

What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

Embedding the Optimal Care Pathways across NSW has the potential to improve cancer outcomes by ensuring everyone receives best practice treatment and care.

Research shows people who get care that meets the standards in the Australian Optimal Care Pathways have a higher chance of surviving cancer than those that do not⁴⁴. By embedding Optimal Care Pathways across the state and introducing public reporting on cancer treatment measures such as wait times, the NSW Government can identify where improvements in the delivery of care are needed. It also ensures that all people diagnosed with cancer know they are receiving the best care, irrespective of where they live or where they receive cancer treatment.



“Having been diagnosed with four different primary cancers between 2020 and 2022, I did my own research and knew I wanted to be referred to a multi-disciplinary team inclusive of allied health professionals who specialised in each cancer type. My research showed, this was my best chance for both survival and getting the best functional outcomes. I don’t understand why this isn’t the standard of care everyone receives. I wanted to live, but also live well.”

Elizabeth Vanderjagt, St Clair NSW

Photographed on Dharug Country

Support people to live well during and after cancer treatment

Whilst cancer survival has improved by almost 40% over the past 30 years³⁷, living longer with cancer doesn't always mean living well. People diagnosed with cancer can face long-term challenges resulting from their cancer diagnosis that can severely reduce quality of life.



As more people will be living with cancer, there's never been a more important time for NSW to develop a sustainable model for survivorship care that will meet the ongoing needs of cancer survivors and to deliver optimal care.

Cancer Council NSW recommendations:

- 1 Establish and fund a NSW cancer survivorship framework based on the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) survivorship model by 2025.
- 2 Ensure people being treated for cancer receive a needs assessment from their healthcare team and receive an appropriate care plan.
- 3 Embed referral pathways that encourage health care providers to refer to appropriate supportive care including services provided by Cancer Council NSW.
- 4 Work with the Australian Government to ensure that primary care providers are supported to provide survivorship care.

Why are we asking the Government to make this change?

Our research has shown that people with a current cancer diagnosis and those with a past cancer diagnosis continue to face unmet supportive care needs, regardless of where they sit along the cancer care continuum. Cancer patients and survivors report that several highly prevalent psychological and physical needs were frequently unmet.

For some of the supportive care needs surveyed, those with a past cancer diagnosis reported unmet needs at higher rates than those with a current cancer, highlighting the importance of quality multidisciplinary care that goes beyond diagnosis and treatment.

Unlike Victoria and South Australia, NSW has no statewide plan to ensure that people are supported to live well with and after a cancer diagnosis. As more people will be diagnosed with cancer, there's never been a more important time for NSW to develop a sustainable model for survivorship care that will meet the ongoing needs of cancer survivors and to deliver optimal care.

What can be achieved if the Government makes this change?

Supporting the health and wellbeing of people beyond a cancer diagnosis and treatment will improve the health outcomes for people affected by cancer. Establishing a statewide survivorship framework would define a minimum standard of survivorship care across NSW to ensure the various needs of cancer survivors are being met along the entire cancer care continuum. An improved model of survivorship care would result in improvements in outcomes for survivors including improvements in survival, reduced risk of cancer recurrence, better quality of life and improved functional and wellbeing outcomes⁴⁵.



Scan for references.



Support our 2023 Election Priorities campaign as we call on the next NSW Government to do all it can to stand by everyone living with cancer and protect life's moments.

Here for Change, Here for life.

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