

ELECTION 2007 - OUR ISSUES

Cancer Voices Australia (CVA) is a national consumer organisation representing Australians affected by cancer. It aims to ensure the voices of people affected by all the different types of cancer are heard at a national level.

The recent growth in support for Cancer Voices Australia is highlighted by the formal launch of Cancer Voices in Victoria (November 2006) and in Queensland (July 2007), now joining organisations in NSW, ACT and WA. SA and most recently Tas will launch later this year. These organisations support CVA nationally and further advocate on state and local issues.

Objectives

- To promote the fundamental rights of Australians affected by cancer
- To effect improvements in cancer treatment, care and support by contributing to national cancer policy and program development, management and evaluation
- To promote the value and benefits of consumer participation in the development of national cancer policy and programs

To provide a forum for member organisations to network and contribute to national activities

Cancer in Australia

Cancer kills more Australians than any other single cause, and opinion polls have found cancer to be the disease that causes most concern in the community.

The burden of cancer in Australia is rising, with 106,000 new cases (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) and 39,200 cancer deaths in 2006, compared with 88,962 new cases and 37,214 deaths in 2001. Cancer currently accounts for 31 per cent of male deaths and 26 per cent of female deaths in Australia and the loss of an estimated 267,000 potential life years.

More than 287,000 Australians are living with cancer, many with persistent and incurable forms.

Projections - All Cancers

For most cancers, the highest incidence rates are in the older groups, so that even with the relatively stable trends in the incidence rate, the projected increase in the Australia population (particularly in the older aged groups) will lead to large increases in the total number of new cases of cancer.

For men, the number of new cases of cancer for all cancers is projected to increase by 32% from 2006 to 2011. For women, the number of new cases of cancer for all cancers is projected to increase by 29% from 2006 to 2011.

These numbers are of concern and with the aging population the impost on services and costs in Australia is significant. The available funding for cancer services in Australia must be spent in the most effective way in order to achieve meaningful outcomes for cancer patients.

[In essence, the burden of cancer in Australia will continue to rise.](#)

CVA Priorities

These priorities are achievable at little extra cost to the health and/or government systems provided there is good will between all the parties involved at both the Federal and State levels of government.

CVA believes that Australia as a developed country should offer its citizens world's best practice cancer treatment and care.

All Australians, regardless of location, income or age, have the right to worlds best practice cancer care which includes:

Multi-Disciplinary Care

- The worlds best practice cancer care is Multidisciplinary Care (MDC). MDC is acknowledged internationally as the best and most effective way to treat cancer

[CVA calls upon both political parties to fund the introduction of MDC in all cancer centres throughout Australia](#)

Availability of new Cancer Therapies

There is a need for greater transparency and consumer involvement in decision-making processes regarding new cancer therapies and their availability.

- Industry links of clinicians, and others, lobbying for new cancer drugs to be on the PBS or for other therapies to be available should be public knowledge.
- Consumers must be involved in the decision making process.
- Approved therapies for a particular cancer should be available on the PBS or funded through Medicare or by the states and territories.

[CVA seeks greater transparency and consumer involvement in decision making processes regarding new cancer therapies](#)

Travel and Accommodation Access

All cancer patients in this country should receive access to the same travel and transport scheme entitlements regardless of their state or territory.

- Funding for isolated patients is one of the longest running health issues in Australia. Numerous studies and reports have recommended changes to the system to ensure that patients who travel to state capitals for treatment over many weeks or months receive sufficient funding.

CVA welcomes the recent Senate Inquiry into the 'PATS' Schemes.

[CVA asks the Government to act quickly and appropriately on the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry.](#)

Reforms to Superannuation

The existing and proposed laws relating to the taxation of superannuation benefits: unreasonably disadvantage the terminally ill and others living with life threatening illnesses; exacerbate the financial stresses they face; and hamper their ability to put their affairs in order before death.

Access to superannuation represents the best chance for these terminally ill cancer patients to bring some semblance of financial order to their lives; to pay for medical costs and transportation, to meet at least some of their debts, and to meet ordinary living costs for themselves and their families when they have no other income. Early access to superannuation also provides an opportunity to order affairs and pay off debts before death, instead of leaving this task to a grieving family. The current laws relating to access to superannuation are very strict indeed and the taxation component payable by a terminally ill cancer patient if they receive approval to access their funds prior to their death are taxed at the marginal rate.

[CVA calls upon the Treasurer to amend the Taxation Laws to enable terminally ill cancer patients to access their superannuation funds early free of tax.](#)

What are the Major Obstacles to Making Improvements?

As cancer patients CVA members have experienced some of the problems first hand; some of us have been full time carers of partners and relatives who have been treated for cancer over an extended period.

In addition, the CVA Management Committee serves on many national and state committees as consumer representatives and has also helped write national reports and recommendations.

CVA is well aware of the issues.

The Role of Government

The continuing issue remains - where does responsibility for cancer in Australia lie - with the Australian Government or with the state and territory governments?

In the past decade many national reports have highlighted the gap between the Australian Government and its Dept of Health & Ageing and what are known as “the jurisdictions” – the state and territory health departments.

National reports consistently and accurately identify the problems but the chasm between the Australian Government and the states and territories in terms of ‘action’ prevents effective resolutions. The result is limited progress and cancer patients not being provided with well co-ordinated multi-disciplinary care. The current structure contributes towards what is described as “The Cancer Lottery”.

Federal Government - Cancer Australia

The Australian Government’s initiative in setting up Cancer Australia provides a threshold for effective change, hopefully at all levels of government and with support from the non-government sector. It is essential that Cancer Australia is well funded otherwise fundamental changes will be unachievable.

We applaud the foresight shown by the current government to establish this body.

[CVA seeks a commitment from all Federal parties to ensure that Cancer Australia remains a vibrant and potent force for Cancer in this country. This can only be done by long term commitment to appropriate funding.](#)

Partnerships

As at July 2007 there are five national reports, including three Senate Reports, which have outstanding recommendations that are yet to be addressed.

In addition there are outstanding recommendations from the now defunct National Cancer Strategy Group and reports from the National Cancer Control Initiative which ceased operating in 2005.

There is a wealth of information and knowledge in all these reports which can assist the reorganisation of cancer services in Australia. They can help towards existing funds for cancer services being spent more effectively.

[CVA calls upon both levels of government to resolve funding issues as they relate to cancer services and for new initiatives to be developed, under the auspices of Cancer Australia.](#)

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