



MEDIA RELEASE

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New research shows more than three times as many cancers are attributable to physical inactivity than previously estimated

New research led by Cancer Council, funded by the Victorian Government, through the Victorian Cancer Agency, has estimated that more than three times as many cancers are attributable to physical inactivity than previously reported, reinforcing the importance of creating environments that support and promote physical activity in Australia.

The paper quantified the proportion of 13 different types of cancer attributable to physical inactivity. An estimated 6,361 of the cancers observed in 2015 were attributable to physical inactivity, representing 4.8% of all cancers diagnosed.

This is a 350% increase from the previous estimation that 1,814 (1.6% of incident cancers) were attributable to physical inactivity in Australia in 2010.

This research reflects that more cancer types, including breast, colon, bladder, endometrial, kidney, oesophageal adenocarcinoma, gastric, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, head and neck, myeloma, myeloid leukaemia, liver, and gallbladder, are now linked to physical inactivity.

More than 2,500 cancer cases (1.9% of all cancers) could have been prevented in 2015 if Australian adults had increased their physical activity by a modest amount (around 40 minutes per week) a decade earlier.

Associate Professor Brigid Lynch, senior author of the paper, said the findings provide a contemporary understanding of the cancer burden due to physical inactivity.

“We now know being physically active reduces the risk of 13 types of cancer. This new research highlights the number of individual cancer diagnoses that could have been prevented if Australians were better supported to integrate regular physical activity into their day.”

Ainslie Sartori, Deputy Chair of Cancer Council’s Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee says these findings are essential to improving how physical activity is considered in cancer prevention policies.

“Australia is a nation proud of its health system, yet we don’t have a physical activity plan or coordinated national physical activity strategy. Combined with changes in food supply, eating behaviours, a rise in convenience and ultra-processed foods, we are living in environments that do not promote healthy lifestyles.”

“We want to ensure there are systems and environments in place for all Australians to develop strong physical activity habits that they can carry on, reducing their risk of developing cancer later in life.”

Cancer Council is calling on all governments to implement the recommendations of the National Preventative Health Strategy and National Obesity Strategy to create supportive environments for Australians to increase their physical activity and live longer and healthier lives.



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Read the paper here: [Estimating cancers attributable to physical inactivity in Australia - Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport \(jsams.org\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7050000/)

Contact details

For all media enquiries and interview opportunities, please contact:
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About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

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