

Media Release

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Australian researchers light the way for global strategy to save 62 million lives

Australian monuments lit up as WHO launches global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer

The World Health Organization overnight marked the launch of their global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health issue with a stunning global show of monuments lit the colour teal, including Melbourne Town Hall, and landmarks as far and wide as Uganda's Jinja Bridge over the Nile, to Canada's Niagara Falls.

This is the first time the world has committed to eliminating a cancer, with 194 countries committing to execute the strategy.

Professor Karen Canfell, who led key research supporting the estimates of the global impact of the WHO strategy, is Chair of Cancer Council's Screening and Immunisation Committee. She explained, "In countries like Australia, the Federal Government led by Health Minister Greg Hunt acted quickly, pioneering the roll out of comprehensive vaccination and a new HPV-based screening program that means Australia is now on track to be the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer.

With over 300,000 women globally dying from cervical cancer each year, in some countries, success is still much further away.

Professor Marion Saville Executive Director of the VCS Foundation continued, "In some of the poorest countries in the world, cervical cancer is the leading cause of cancer death, with close to 90% of cervical cancer deaths worldwide occurring in low and middle income countries.

"The launch of this strategy is a momentous occasion, and it will be a real step forward in improving women's health and reducing inequities amongst some of our most disadvantaged populations."

Associate Professor Lisa Whop, Senior Research Fellow at the Australian National University, added, "Cervical cancer is a true disease of inequities, and there is still much work to do in Australia to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations achieve the same vaccination and screening rates.

"Eliminating cervical cancer is possible for Indigenous populations but it requires concerted effort from all sectors of the health system to ensure these groups aren't left behind in the push to reach elimination."

Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are caused by the human papillomavirus, however through a combination of vaccination and cervical screening with the new HPV test used in the Australian National Cervical Screening Program, most cases of cervical cancer can be prevented.

Research by Cancer Council NSW and collaborators at Harvard University in the US and Laval University in Canada, which contributed to the formation of the WHO strategy, showed that more than 62 million lives could be saved over the next century if 78 low and middle income countries could rapidly scale up cervical cancer vaccination, screening and cancer treatment services.

To reach elimination, the WHO strategy defines three targets to be met by every country by 2030:

- 90% of girls being vaccinated against HPV
- 70% coverage for twice-lifetime cervical screening with a high precision approach such as HPV testing
- 90% coverage for treatment of preinvasive lesions and invasive cancer

Professor Ian Frazer, a leader in the development of the HPV vaccine, explained the target is ambitious but achievable.

“We have the technology to eliminate cervical cancer, and the evidence to show it is feasible. We now need to prioritise scaling up resources for low and middle income countries to ensure they have the capabilities to implement HPV vaccination programs, high coverage cervical screening, and establish cancer treatment services to achieve global elimination.

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You can read more about the WHO's launch [here](#).