

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 23 August 2019

Cancer Council welcomes funding as liver cancer rates skyrocket

Funding could help curb 200% increase in liver cancer death rates

Cancer Council Australia has welcomed the announcement of \$780,000 in federal government funding to address Australia's rapidly increasing liver cancer rates and deaths.

The funding for the Optimising Liver Cancer Control in Australia (OLCCA) project will be used to identify priority actions for clinicians, researchers and policy makers to improve liver cancer outcomes in Australia over the next five, 10 and up to 20 years.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO Cancer Council Australia said that the funding, announced on Daffodil Day, was crucial, with recent data showing liver cancer incidence has almost quadrupled in Australia.

"Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data has shown the incidence of liver cancer has increased by an alarming 378% and mortality has increased by 204% since 1982.

"Previously we typically saw 1.8 people diagnosed with liver cancer per 100,000 people however since 1982, this figure has now risen to 8.6 per 100,000 people.

"It is estimated 2,161 people will die from liver cancer this year, making liver cancer now the fifth most common cause of cancer death in men and seventh in women.

"Estimates have shown 65% of liver cancer deaths could be prevented with adequate public health measures and early detection and treatment programs for those who are at high risk."

Around 34.4% of liver cancer cases in Australia are attributable to hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) and smoking and alcohol, account for 20.7% and 12.5% of cases respectively. A further 25% of liver cancer cases are attributed to overweight and obesity.

Professor Aranda explained the funding will be an important first step in determining strategies that will help reduce the impact of liver cancer.

"Liver cancer has a survival rate of just 18%, compared to the overall cancer survival rate for all cancer types which is close to 70%, so there is a clear need for action.

"Currently there is no coordinated approach to liver cancer prevention and early detection in Australia. The project will bring together experts in liver cancer to review current practice, consult stakeholders and recommend changes to current policy and practices.

"This will support health professionals to deliver best-practice care for the prevention and management of liver cancer through the development of clinical guidance based on the latest evidence.

"An estimated 450,000 Australians are currently living with HBV or HCV, which causes over one third of liver cancer cases.

"If we can better identify people who are at risk of HBV or HCV, we can improve vaccination rates and for those who already have HBV or HCV, surveillance and medication to prevent or delay cirrhosis or liver cancer."

ENDS



For more information please contact:

Tegan Brown, Cancer Council Australia, media@cancer.org.au or call (02) 8063 4109 (our media landline diverts to our on-call mobile outside of hours).