

World Cancer Day 2023: WHO Theme: Health for All

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“Close the care gap”, and the call to unite our voices and take action

February 4 is recognized as World Cancer Day throughout the world. The main purpose is to inform and motivate the public on the various pertinent aspects related to it is therapy, early detection, and prevention. This action was performed by the Union for International Cancer Control to promote and fight for the goals of the 2008 World Cancer Declaration.¹

Cancer is a disorder when certain body cells develop out of control and spread to other body regions. Cancer is a leading cause of mortality worldwide, accounting for more than one crore fatalities in 2020. Between 19 and 20 lakh (estimated) cases were reported as the incidence rate in India in 2022. The risk factors include the use of tobacco, heavy alcohol consumption, poor eating patterns, insufficient exercise, and exposure to air pollution.²

As cancer is the second most common cause of death in the world, accounting for almost 1 in 6 fatalities. Most cancer cases in the WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region are only found in their later stages, when treatment options are no longer effective and patient outcomes are worse. According to projected models, the cancer burden in the region will rise at the quickest pace among the six WHO regions by 2030. The prevention and control of cancer is still in its infancy and lacks a defined strategic direction, despite encouraging trends in a number of the region's countries.

Around four lakhs in the Eastern Mediterranean, there are yearly cancer fatalities. Over the past five years, there have been over 1.6 million cancer diagnoses in the Area, making it a recurring burden that significantly strains individuals, families, and communities on a physical, emotional, and financial level. About 7,34,000 people are expected to receive a cancer diagnosis each year, and the number would increase by almost 50% by 2040.

The goals of World Cancer Day are to increase the public perception of cancer as a public health concern and to help improve efforts to make high-quality care, early diagnosis, screening, treatment, and palliative care accessible. The campaign to “bridge the care gap,” which is this year's topic, is in its second year and focuses on raising awareness of the disparities in cancer care and encouraging action to overcome those gaps.³

Understanding and recognizing the global disparities in cancer care were the main goals of the “Close the Care Gap” campaign's first year. It is important to keep an open mind, question presumptions, and consider the cold, hard facts.

- Unfairness in cancer treatment costs lives.
- Cancer patients face obstacles at every turn as they seek treatment.

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- Care can be severely impacted by a number of factors, including finances, education, geography, and prejudice based on race, gender, orientation, age, disability, and lifestyle.
- Everyone is impacted by the gap, including loved ones.
- These limitations are not inflexible. They are changeable.

This is the year to challenge the existing quo and contribute to the eradication of stigma, and to hear the perspectives of persons coping with cancer and their communities and use those experiences to inform our decisions and actions. That is how we can start to envision a new way of doing things and herald the arrival of a more equitable future, one in which everyone has better access to health and cancer services and lives longer, regardless of where they are born, grow, age, work, or reside.⁴

The day will also be focused on examining socioeconomic factors that affect disparities in cancer prevention, incidence, and survival, such as cultural and gender norms, income and education levels, and biases based on age, gender, ethnicity, handicap, and lifestyle.

The regional framework for action on cancer prevention and control was created and approved in 2017 to increase guidance to nations and support the implementation of the regional framework for action to implement the World Health Assembly resolution on cancer prevention and control in the context of an integrated approach and the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases. Governance, early identification, prevention, treatment, palliative care, and monitoring and research are the six key areas that the framework's indicators help governments monitor.

The framework will aid in directing decision-making about priority interventions and policy alternatives for cancer prevention and control, and it will allow countries to identify which aspects of cancer prevention and control need to be scaled up in the light of their respective national contexts.

Addressing the cancer risk resulting from a number of chronic conditions presents a special challenge for low- and medium-income countries. These countries also had a bad prognosis for cancer because of a lack of education, a delay in diagnosis, and limited access to affordable treatment. The lack of cancer awareness also contributes to a delay in diagnosis in poorer nations. According to a study published in 2023, which was carried out in four significant Indian cities, the bulk of cancer patients do not start receiving therapy until they are well along in the disease. Low poverty and the literacy rate have a big impact on cancer awareness. Higher income earners and more literate individuals in India are more aware about cancer than others.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need to fill the knowledge gaps with appropriate education because there is a low level of general awareness of cancer screening, prevention, and treatment among Indian and global populations, particularly in low- and middle-income countries with low literacy rates contributing to an increase in cancer prevalence. The importance of cancer prevention, early detection, and effective treatment is inherent in World Cancer Day.²

“Together, let’s educate people about the need to close the cancer care gap.”

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