

# **WOMEN AND CANCER**

## **Women's Health Grampians**

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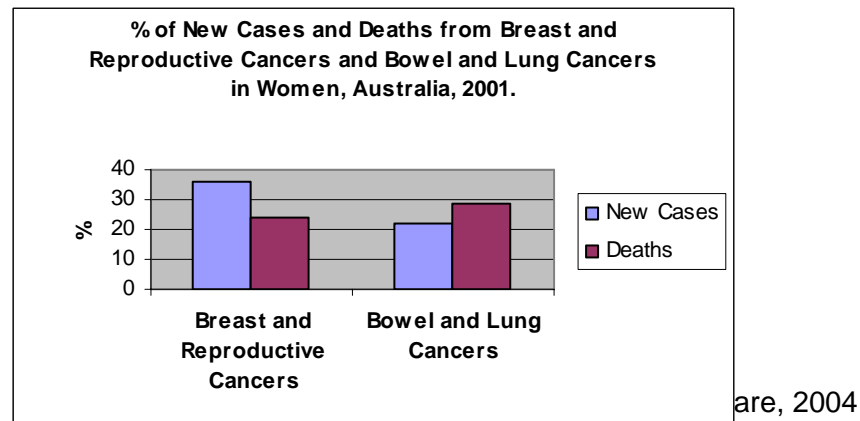
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## Women and Cancer

### Introduction

Some cancers such as gynaecological cancers are specific to women, and others, like breast cancer, predominantly affect women and require gender specific programs.



Nationally, newly diagnosed cases of breast and reproductive cancers (36%) are more common than bowel and lung cancer combined (22%); however, deaths from breast and reproductive cancers (24%) are less than those from bowel and lung cancers (29%)<sup>1</sup>.

For cancers that are common to both women and men there may be gender differences in their diagnosis rate, treatment outcomes, and support needs<sup>2</sup>.

### Sex Differences

- Breast cancer is 100 times more prevalent in women than in men, and, before the age of 75 years, Victorian women have a lifetime risk of breast cancer of 1 in 11<sup>3</sup>.
- For women, only 65% of lung cancer is smoking-related<sup>4</sup>.
- Women are more likely to be diagnosed with lung adenocarcinoma, the form most commonly diagnosed in young people and those who have never smoked<sup>5</sup>. This may be connected to passive smoking exposure and other environmental factors.
- Fewer women than men show signs of poor lung function when newly diagnosed with lung cancer, which could mean that they are missed in screening for the disease<sup>6</sup>

### Gender Influences

- The tobacco industry targets young women via a number of discreet marketing campaigns<sup>7,8</sup>.
- Women are more likely to have used a solarium than men<sup>9</sup>, and the group to use solariums most frequently are women between the ages of 25 and 44 years<sup>10</sup>. Solarium use increases exposure to UV rays and increases the risk of skin cancer<sup>11</sup>.
- Women generally have lower socioeconomic status than men, and higher familial and caring responsibilities. This may be a factor that precludes them from accessing screening services.
- All people affected by cancer face challenges, however, women can face many difficulties due to familial and caring responsibilities and financial circumstances.

- Women caring for someone with cancer often report more distress, more unmet needs, and higher levels of anxiety and depression than men in the same situation<sup>12,13</sup>.

### Implications for the Future

Significant lessons can be learnt from the successes that have been achieved in addressing cancer in women. Some of these lessons include:

- high levels of public awareness of cancer risk factors
- high screening rates
- the proliferation of comprehensive cancer support services and groups
- the empowerment of women to participate in their treatment and choose its direction.

These successes should act as models for future health policy and service direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Australian Association of Cancer Registries (2004) *Cancer in Australia 2001*. AIHW Cat. No. CAN23. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> Rice K & Walker C (2004) *Gender Impact Assessment Paper: Cancer*. Women's Health Victoria, Melbourne.

<sup>3</sup> Giles GG, and Thursfield V. *Canstat: Breast Cancer. No 34*. Cancer Epidemiology Centre, Victorian Anti-Cancer Council, Melbourne, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Ridolfo B and Stevenson C (2001) *The Quantification of Drug-caused Mortality and Morbidity in Australia*, 1998. AIHW cat. No. PHE29. Canberra: AIHW (Drug Statistics Series no. 7).

<sup>5</sup> Muscat JE, Wynder EL (1995) Lung cancer pathology in smokers, ex-smokers and never smokers. *Cancer Lett.* 88: 1-5.

<sup>6</sup> Loganathan R S, Stover D E, Shi W and Venketraman E. (2006) Prevalence of COPD in Women Compared to Men Around the Time of Diagnosis of Primary Lung Cancer. *Chest.* 129: 1305 – 1312.

<sup>7</sup> Samet Jonathon & Yoon Soon-Young Eds. (2001). *Women and the Tobacco Epidemic: Challenges for the 21st Century*, World Health Organisation, Canada.

<sup>8</sup> Harper T (2001) *Marketing Life After Advertising Bans*, *Tobacco Control* 2001; 10: 196-198.

<sup>9</sup> The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and The Cancer Council Australia. *Sun Protection and Sunburn Incidence of Australian Adults: Summer 2003-04*.

<sup>10</sup> The Cancer Council Australia (2004) *Cancer Council Finds Many Australians Exposed by Solariums*  
<http://www.cancervic.org.au/cancer1/whatsnew/mediareleases/2004/20041201a.htm>  
 Accessed on 19/05/2006.

<sup>11</sup> Sunsmart (2004) *Information Sheet: Solariums*. Sunsmart.

<sup>12</sup> Northouse L L, Mood D, Templin T, Mellon S & George T. (2000) Couples' Patterns of Adjustment to Colon Cancer in *Social Science and Medicine*. 50(2): 271 – 284.

<sup>13</sup> Ussher, J. M., & Sandoval, M. (2005). *Gender issues in the experience of cancer care: A comparison of male and female cancer carers living in NSW*. Paper presented at the 'Shifting paradigms in health care: Leading practice in carer support' conference, Carers New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.