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**More Australians surviving cancer than ever before,
but new research shows the hidden legal and financial cost is mounting**

Recent projections show 2.6 million Australians will be living with or beyond cancer by 2050, but people with cancer and carers are being increasingly pushed into financial hardship, prompting calls for urgent reform.

More Australians are surviving cancer than ever before, but Australia's legal and financial protections for those undergoing treatment have not kept pace, says Cancer Council Australia.

A new McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer report exposes a widening gap between the support people with cancer need and what the system actually provides, with Cancer Council Australia calling for urgent reform across our workplace, welfare and healthcare systems.

The call follows recent projections from The Daffodil Centre, a partnership between Cancer Council NSW and the University of Sydney, which estimated that nearly 1.7 million Australians are currently living with or beyond cancer. By 2050, that number is set to rise by more than half to over 2.6 million people. Of those, 1.15 million will still be living with cancer requiring ongoing treatment, monitoring, or care. As the number of Australians living with cancer grows, having adequate systems able to support them has never been more urgent.

The McCabe Centre report, *Counting the Cost of Cancer: Legal and Financial Impacts on Victorians*, surveyed and interviewed more than 200 Victorians living with cancer or providing unpaid care. While the research was based in Victoria, Cancer Council Australia says these experiences are shared by people with cancer and their families across the country.

Key findings:



- Every single participant reported out-of-pocket costs
- More than 95% reported emotional distress linked to financial hardship
- Almost one in three people with cancer (30%) lost income
- Nearly two thirds (64%) received no government financial support
- Among carers, more than three quarters (78%) received no government financial support and almost one in three (32%) lost income.

Cancer Council Australia Director of Cancer Control Policy, David Martin, said the findings reflected a system in urgent need of reform.

"Five-year cancer survival has risen from around 46% in 1986 to 72% today. That is something to celebrate. But surviving cancer is only part of the story," said Martin. "Every person in the McCabe Centre research faced out-of-pocket costs. Nearly one in three lost income. And yet the majority received no government financial support at all. People in the most disadvantaged areas are already more likely to die from cancer, and when the system then adds financial and legal stress on top of that, it is failing the people who need it most.

"Additionally, by 2050, more than 2.6 million Australians will be living with or beyond cancer. We want to ensure they have support they need to live well and our systems are fit for the future. If we do not fix the systems that are failing people today, we are building a much bigger problem for tomorrow.

"A cancer diagnosis should not destroy someone's -livelihood. It should not come down to whether a person happened to have savings or income protection insurance. That is not equitable, and as more Australians live longer with cancer, this problem will only grow."

The McCabe Centre research also found major gaps in workplace support:

- Only 3% of workers with cancer reported receiving information about their workplace rights.



- Almost nine in ten people with cancer who reported workplace challenges (87%) said those challenges caused them distress, and among carers who faced workplace difficulties, 100% said it caused distress.
- Existing leave arrangements were found not to reflect the realities of long-term cancer treatment or care, with outcomes often dependent on employer goodwill rather than enforceable rights.

Legal challenges were equally pervasive:

- More than two in five people with cancer (41%) experienced legal issues; more than four in five (81%) did not fully expect them, and nearly four in five (79%) did not see a lawyer.
- Among carers, more than two thirds (67%) faced legal issues. Common issues included financial hardship and debt, workplace difficulties, problems accessing government support and insurance, and navigating legal decision-making at a time of reduced capacity.

Cancer Council Australia recognises that meaningful reform must address the full breadth of financial toxicity facing people with cancer. As immediate priorities, the organisation is calling on the Australian Government to take three specific actions:

- First, make it easier for people with cancer to access income support. Navigating Centrelink while seriously ill is currently too hard. People should be able to access the right payments through Services Australia without excessive paperwork and red tape.
 - Second, strengthen workplace rights for people with cancer and their carers. The National Employment Standards have not been reviewed in 16 years. The current inquiry is an opportunity to update them so they reflect the reality of living with and caring for someone with cancer.
 - Third, plan now for the growing number of Australians living long-term with cancer. By 2050, the number of cancer survivors aged eighty and over is expected to more than double. Additionally, people aged 60–79 years are projected to account for 49.3% of total 5-year prevalence and 42.5% of total 30-year prevalence in 2050. Health, social security and aged care systems need to be ready.
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Media Release

The McCabe Centre's full report, including detailed findings and reform priorities, is available at mccabecentre.org. Cancer Council's free information and support line, 13 11 20, is available to anyone impacted by cancer.

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Contact details

For all media enquiries and interview opportunities, please contact:

Cancer Council Australia, media@cancer.org.au

02 8256 4109 (redirects to mobile outside of business hours)

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

Find out more at cancer.org.au, or visit our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [LinkedIn](#)

