

CANCER IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE IN QUEENSLAND 1997– 2006

Incidence and Mortality

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BACKGROUND

Cancer is now the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (respectfully referred to here as Indigenous). As Indigenous people are more likely to experience ill-health and to die at younger ages than other Australians, it is important that we have a better understanding of how cancer affects Indigenous people.



This brochure reports on the number of cases of cancer among Indigenous people in Queensland between 1997 and 2006 and compares this to the rest of the Queensland population. Also listed are the types of cancer Indigenous people are getting and how many pass away from having cancer. This information comes from the Queensland Cancer Registry and Australian Bureau of Statistics and we received permission to do the study from Queensland Health.

HOW MANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE GET CANCER (INCIDENCE)?

1936 cases of cancer were identified in Queensland (between 1997 and 2006). Indigenous people were 21% less likely to get cancer than other people in Queensland.

When compared to other Queenslanders:

- Indigenous men were less likely to get bowel, skin and prostate cancer
- Indigenous women were less likely to get breast, bowel and skin cancer or lymphoma and leukaemia.

However, some of these cancer were still very common amongst Indigenous people in Queensland. (Table 1)

Table 1: Most commonly occurring cancers among Indigenous men and women

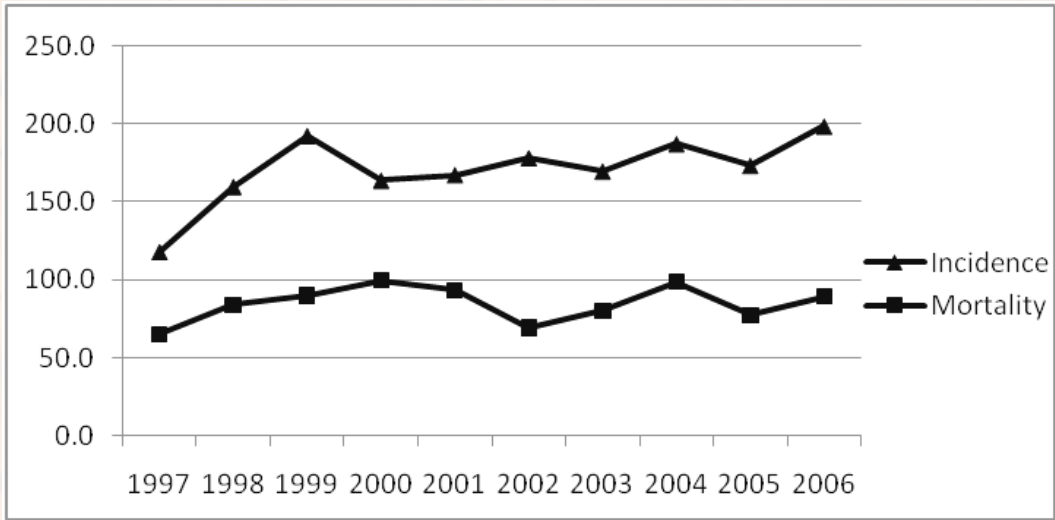
INDIGENOUS MEN	INDIGENOUS WOMEN
1. Lung	1. Breast
2. Prostate	2. Lung
3. Bowel	3. Cervix
4. Lymphoma and leukaemia	4. Bowel
5. Head and Neck	5. Uterine (womb)

- Indigenous people were almost twice as likely to get lung cancer and almost 3 times as likely to get liver and oesophagus (gullet) cancer
- Indigenous women were over 3 times more likely to get cervical cancer and more than twice as likely to get uterine (womb) cancer.

HOW MANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE PASS AWAY FROM CANCER (MORTALITY)?

- 955 Indigenous people passed away from cancer between 1997 and 2006; (495 men and 460 women).
- Indigenous people were 36% more likely to pass away from cancer than other Queenslanders.
- Indigenous people were more likely to pass away from lung, head and neck, oesophagus and liver cancer than other Queenslanders.
- Indigenous women were 7.5 times more likely to pass away from cervical cancer and 4.6 times from uterine (womb) cancer.

Figure 1: Cancer incidence and mortality trends were generally stable after 1997, when the QCR commenced recording Indigenous status routinely in cancer records



CONCLUSION

Compared with non-Indigenous people in Queensland, Indigenous people are less likely to get cancer overall, but more likely to get cancers which are more serious. Cancer loss of life for Indigenous Queenslanders is greater overall.

REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008). The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

ETHICAL APPROVAL and COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from Queensland Health and the Queensland Institute of Medical Research .

The Indigenous Strategic Health Unit at Queensland Health and the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council supported the study.

An Indigenous Reference Group guided and advised the researchers.

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Lowitja Institute
Catherine Jacka
Robyn Chilcott

This Information has been adapted especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and communities from the publication "Cancer Incidence and mortality in Indigenous Australians in Queensland, 1997-2006 (2010) S Moore, P O'Rourke, K Mallitt, G Garvey, A Green, M Coory and P Valery, in the Medical Journal of Australia, 15 Nov

The painting on the cover depicts the community in the middle made up of adults and children of all ages. The shapes around the community indicate cancer. The community are reaching out for help but don't always know where to go or how to access the help they need. The large circles represent services that could lead or guide the community to the help they need but the community don't know how to get there. The lines joining the circles across the painting represent the pathways and supports to get the help needed. The shapes at the top and bottom represent other community groups and elders meeting and talking. This artwork is one painting in a series about cancer prepared by Robyn Chilcott, a descendant of the Gamillaroi peoples of northern New South Wales and has family connections with Wakka Wakka peoples (Cherbourg).