

# MYTH 4: CANCER IS MY FATE

## TRUTH:

With the right strategies,

**A THIRD OF  
THE MOST  
COMMON  
CANCERS CAN  
BE PREVENTED.**



## CANCER PREVENTION

Prevention is the most cost-effective and sustainable way of reducing the global cancer burden in the long-term.

### ? EVIDENCE

- Global, regional and national policies and programmes that promote healthy lifestyles can substantially reduce cancers that are caused by risk factors such as alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity. Improving diet, physical activity and maintaining a healthy body weight could prevent around a third of the most common cancers.
- Based on current trends, tobacco use is estimated to kill one billion people in the 21st century. Addressing tobacco use, which is linked to 71% of all lung cancer deaths, and accounts for at least 22% of all cancer deaths is therefore critical.
- For developing countries, the situation often goes beyond addressing behavioural change, with many countries facing a 'double burden' of exposures, the most common of which is cancer-causing infections. Chronic infections are estimated to cause approximately 16% of all cancers globally, with this figure rising to almost 23% in developing countries. Several of the most common cancers in developing countries such as liver, cervical and stomach cancers are associated with infections with hepatitis B virus (HBV), the human papillomavirus (HPV), and the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), respectively. As a consequence, the introduction of safe, effective and affordable vaccines should be implemented as part of national cancer control plans.
- Exposure to a wide range of environmental causes of cancer in our personal and professional lives, including exposure to indoor air pollution, radiation and excessive sunlight are also major preventable causes of cancer



### GLOBAL ADVOCACY MESSAGE

Effective cancer prevention at the national level begins with a national cancer control plan (NCCP) that responds to a country's cancer burden and cancer risk factor prevalence, and is designed to implement evidence-based resource-appropriate policies and programmes that **reduce the level of exposure to risk factors** for cancer and strengthen the capacity of individuals to adopt **healthy lifestyle choices**.

## CANCER KNOWLEDGE

Lack of information and awareness about cancer is a critical obstacle to effective cancer control and care in developing countries, especially for the detection of cancers at earlier and more treatable stages.

### ? EVIDENCE

- In many developing countries, misconceptions about diagnosis and treatment and stigma associated with cancer can lead individuals to seek alternative care in place of standard treatment or to avoid care altogether. Understanding and responding to cultural beliefs and practices is essential.
- Although general cancer awareness in developing countries remains low, even among health professionals, levels of concern about cancer are high, and the public pays attention to messaging about the disease.
- Individuals, policy makers and healthcare professionals need to understand that many cancers can be prevented through appropriate lifestyle change, that cancer can often be cured, and that effective treatments are available, regardless of the resource setting.
- Recent experience with screening and vaccination programmes in developing countries suggests that once people understand basic information about cancer and know how to access services they tend to come for the services. Equally important is the development of strategies to encourage help seeking behaviour, including awareness and education of ways to recognise the signs and symptoms, and understanding that timely evaluation will increase the opportunities for cure.

## CANCER OUTCOMES

Disparities in cancer outcomes exist between the developed and developing world for most cancers.

### ? EVIDENCE

- Patients whose cancers are curable in the developed world unnecessarily suffer and die due to a lack of awareness, resources and access to affordable, effective and quality cancer services that enable early diagnosis and appropriate treatment and care.
- The reality of cancer cure rates in children is reflective of the inexcusable inequities in global access to treatment and care. There are an estimated 160,000 newly diagnosed cases of childhood cancer worldwide each year with more than 70% of the world's children with cancer lacking access to effective treatment. The result is an unacceptably low survival rate of ~10% in developing countries compared to ~90% in high-income countries.
- In many cases the largest and most unacceptable gap in cancer care is the lack of adequate palliative care and access to pain relief for much of the world's population. A short list of medications can control pain for almost 90% of all people with cancer pain including children, yet millions of cancer patients have little to no access to adequate pain treatment.



### GLOBAL ADVOCACY MESSAGE

The approach and scope of an **effective cancer prevention programme** takes into account not only economic factors but also **social and cultural factors**. Comprehensive prevention programmes that include strategies to improve knowledge of cancer among communities, health professionals and policy makers, expand access to services and promote healthy foods and facilitate physical activity have, the greatest chance of success.



### GLOBAL ADVOCACY MESSAGE

**Efficacious and cost-effective interventions** must be made **available** in an **equitable** manner through cancer prevention, early detection and treatment delivered as part of national cancer control plans (NCCPs) that respond to the national cancer burden.

**Access to effective, quality and affordable cancer services is a right** of all individuals and should not be determined by where you live.

[worldcancerday.org](http://worldcancerday.org)

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