

insight

Creating hope for
a cancer free future



Queensland campaign goes global: Working together to defeat distress



Photo by Richard Waugh

Our CEO Professor Jeff Dunn (above) has embarked on a global campaign to have distress listed as the sixth vital sign in medicine, alongside pulse, blood pressure, temperature, respiratory rate and pain.

On the advent of Cancer Council Queensland's 50th Anniversary, Prof Dunn says the campaign could transform the experience of cancer treatment for the significant number of patients who experience distress.

"More than 30 per cent of cancer patients experience ongoing psychological challenges, such as anxiety and distress, as a result of their illness.

"We must address the psychosocial needs of people diagnosed with cancer to ensure their total wellbeing," he says.

"It's a tremendously important issue."

Prof Dunn, a behavioural scientist, said listing distress as the sixth vital sign would require doctors to assess and manage each patient's psychological state.

"Cancer patients who experience symptoms of distress should be immediately referred to the Cancer Council Helpline to access specialised support.

"If you provide appropriate support, such as referral to our Cancer Counselling Service, we can improve the patient's quality of life.

"Easing distress improves the patient's ability to cope, reduces levels of anxiety, and enables greater compliance with treatment.

"If we can achieve global recognition of distress as the sixth vital sign over the next five years, it will be a major breakthrough in supportive care for cancer patients around the world, requiring health

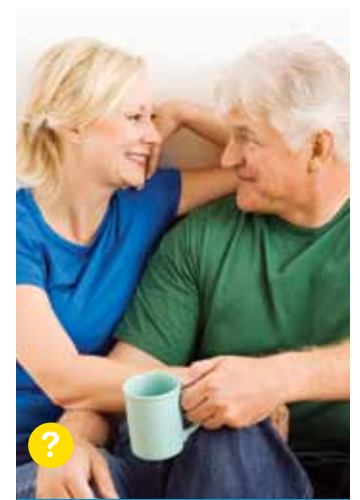
professionals to look after the whole person, not just the physical symptoms of illness."

Prof Dunn has so far achieved support for the move from cancer organisations worldwide, including the Canadian Cancer Society, the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia, and the Union for International Cancer Control.

"Our current priority is to engage the World Health Organisation in supporting the initiative, a challenge I've been asked to guide as a board member of the International Psycho-Oncology Society.

"WHO support will be critical to achieve widespread acceptance that cancer-related psychological distress must be routinely assessed and managed."

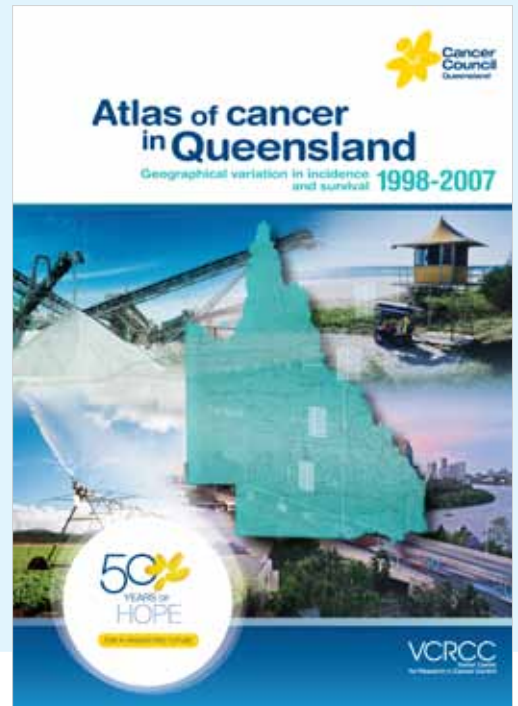
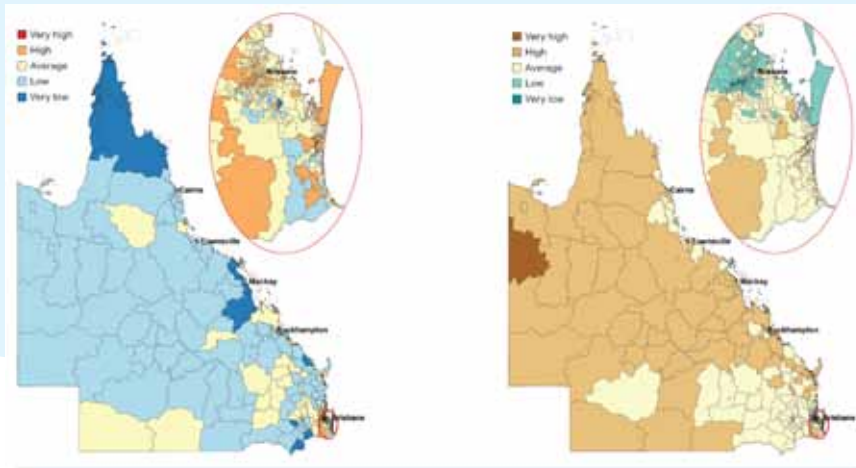
"For people affected by cancer, emotional distress can be as overwhelming as the diagnosis and treatment, and we are committed to doing something about it." Prof Dunn.



CANCER FACT:

Evidence shows that psychosocial support can increase a patient's well-being, reduce distress, and improve quality of life.

Celebrating 50 years of research and support: The first Atlas of Cancer in Queensland points the way towards improved survival



Cancer Council Queensland (CCQ) has published the first Atlas of Cancer in Queensland, launching the start of statewide celebrations for our 50th Anniversary.

The Atlas provides a comprehensive picture of how cancer incidence and survival varies across the 478 statistical local areas in Queensland, based on latest data.

CCQ researcher and co-author of the report, Susanna Cramb, says publication of the Atlas is a historic milestone for cancer control in Queensland.

“The Atlas is significant for its contribution to our understanding of how cancer incidence and survival affects Queenslanders differently depending on where a person lives.

“It showcases how far we have come over the past 50 years and provides an

inspiring reminder that we have more work to do.”

Ms Cramb says while there have been many improvements in health during the 20th century, these improvements have not been shared equally, and some population groups continue to have poorer health.

“The Atlas shows a consistent pattern that when survival varied across Queensland, cancer patients living in more rural or disadvantaged areas had lower survival compared to the Queensland average.

“If survival outcomes in these rural areas were improved to the current Queensland average survival, an estimated 1,223 cancer-related deaths within five years of diagnosis (795 males, 428 females) could have been prevented.

“This represents nine per cent of cancer related deaths during this period.”

Ms Cramb says the Atlas provides a key tool for reducing these differences, by creating a better understanding of where the disparities are.

“The Atlas will help to inform our ongoing research into geographical disparities, so that we can better understand the factors that influence variations in cancer incidence and survival.

“Variations may be caused by a range of factors, including, but not restricted to, environmental factors, access to screening and diagnostic services, stage at diagnosis, access to effective treatment and care, migration of cancer patients, the mix of cancer types present in that region, or even chance.”

Ms Cramb says the report will provide a rationale for greater allocation of funding and resources to improve detection and survival outcomes for cancer

patients across the whole of Queensland.

To view the Atlas or find out more about our 50th Anniversary, go to www.cancerqld.org.au.



CANCER FACT:

There is no way of knowing how many people were diagnosed with cancer in 1961, but we estimate there may have been about 5,000 Queenslanders newly diagnosed with cancer in 1961, compared to about 21,000 today. By 2016, as many as 30,000 Queenslanders will be diagnosed with cancer each year.

Our latest research reveals new hope for cancer survival prospects

New research by Cancer Council Queensland has found the prognosis for Queensland cancer patients generally improves with each additional year that they survive.

The research, published in the Medical Journal of Australia, could help to provide patients with more accurate estimates of their survival prospects, if the estimates are routinely included in cancer statistical reports.

Cancer Council Queensland (CCQ) lead researcher, Associate Professor Peter Baade (above), says the findings would be encouraging for

Queenslanders affected by cancer.

“One of the most common unmet psychological needs cancer survivors report is fear that their cancer will recur and this fear can diminish the survivor’s quality of life.

“A clearer understanding that survival after cancer improves year on year may help patients feel more hopeful about the future, and potentially decrease their anxiety.”

A/Prof Baade says it was important for doctors to help cancer patients understand that the further they progress from the time of diagnosis, the greater

their chance of long-term survival.

“Conditional survival estimates provide quantitative data for what is often observed anecdotally in clinical settings – that there are some patients who survive beyond what was predicted at the time of their diagnosis, and that the long-term prognosis for these patients continues to improve.

“This is critical information for cancer survivors to receive and understand and it is important that these data are incorporated into routine statistical reports.

“Providing patients with this knowledge would

be an effective way of building realistic hope and helping people to manage uncertainty about the future.”

The research paper is the latest work to be reported by CCQ’s researchers, who had more than 40 peer-reviewed scientific papers published in leading national and international journals in 2010, on the eve of our 50th Anniversary.

A copy of the research paper is published online by the Medical Journal of Australia:

http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/194_02_170111/baa10523_fm.html.

Building on Hope

Work is continuing on the development of two new accommodation lodges for regional cancer patients.

In Cairns, the refurbishment of an existing motel will commence soon, pending finalisation of architectural and other plans.

In Toowoomba plans are also progressing, with an announcement likely to be made in the near future.

In 2010, we provided nearly 17,500 nights of accommodation at lodges in Townsville, Rockhampton and Brisbane.



Supporting cancer patients after the cyclone and floods

Cancer Council Queensland quickly responded to the needs of cancer patients in the aftermath of Cyclone Yasi and recent floods.

With more than 21,000 Queenslanders diagnosed with cancer each year, and an estimated 160,000 Queenslanders alive today following a cancer diagnosis, many patients have been hard hit by the cyclone in North Queensland and statewide flooding.

The head of our Community Services team, Claire Kelly, says the impacts of a natural disaster can exacerbate the distress experienced by many cancer patients.

“For cancer patients who are already coping with the challenges of cancer and cancer treatments, a natural disaster can compound life stresses.

“Normal reactions include feeling overwhelmed, not being able to concentrate or make simple decisions, difficulty sleeping and frequent thoughts and images of distressing events. Although these reactions usually become less severe as time passes, it’s important to provide patients with specialised support to enable adjustment and coping.

“When natural disasters occur, access to treatment services and other avenues of support may also be restricted and treatment routines may change.

“Our Helpline remained on call during recent flood and cyclone emergencies to provide patients and the community with advice and information about health services and support.

“We were on alert to provide emotional support as well as practical advice.”

We also published a fact sheet on our website to help patients with coping after a natural disaster.

“The fact sheet was designed to help patients make informed decisions about their options for accessing appropriate care and support during the clean-up and recovery.”

Ms Kelly reminded cancer patients in regions affected by the cyclone and floods to be careful to protect themselves from infections.

“Some kinds of cancer and some treatments for cancer can weaken the immune system, making patients or recent patients susceptible to infections.

“If you are currently undergoing cancer treatment, or if you are weakened by your previous treatment, always avoid exposure to contaminated sites.

“We recommend patients and recent patients absolutely avoid contact with mud and mould.

“We understand the need to return home as soon as possible, but it’s important for cancer patients to avoid exposure to germs in order to maintain wellness and optimise their recovery.

“People who’d like cancer-related information and assistance after the cyclone and floods can phone our Helpline for information, support, and referrals, on 13 11 20.”

For a copy of the fact sheet visit www.cancerqld.org.au or phone our Helpline team on 13 11 20.

 **Cancer Council Helpline**
13 11 20

50
YEARS OF
HOPE

FOR A CANCER FREE FUTURE

50 years

of supporting Queenslanders affected by cancer

 **Cancer Council Queensland**

www.cancerqld.org.au