

# Understanding optimal care pathways

Optimal care pathways (OCP) are national guides that define the best cancer care for specific types of cancer. These pathways aim to improve patient outcomes by taking an evidence-based approach to providing consistent, safe and high-quality cancer care to all Australians diagnosed with cancer.

The pathways describe the key stages in a patient's cancer journey, from diagnosis to survivorship or end-of-life care. They outline expected optimal care at each stage of the cancer journey to ensure all people diagnosed with cancer get the best care, regardless of where they live or have treatment.

The pathways are nationally endorsed by the National Cancer Expert Reference Group, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, Cancer Australia and Cancer Council Australia. Pancare Foundation's programs and services are aligned to OCPs and guide the way we support patients and their families.

## The seven principles of care

Seven key principles underpin OCPs. These principles of care define appropriate and supportive cancer care that is the right of all patients, families and carers:

**Patient-centred care** is respectful of and responsive to, the preferences, needs and values of patients and carers. It also enables patients to make informed choices and provide consent around their treatment and care. Patient-centred care increases the experience and satisfaction of patients, their families and carers, and staff.

**Safe and quality care** is the responsibility of hospitals and health professionals. Health professionals must be appropriately trained and credentialled. Patients should be referred to an individual practitioner or service with appropriate expertise, and hospitals and clinics that have the equipment and staffing capacity to support safe and high-quality care.

**Multidisciplinary care** is an integrated team approach to healthcare. It's care in which medical and allied health professionals consider all relevant treatment options and collaboratively develop an individual treatment and care plan for each patient while taking into account their personal preferences.

**Supportive care** is a vital part of any cancer treatment program and is an umbrella term used to refer to all services that may be required by people affected by cancer. Supportive care is made up of all the services, information and resources patients may need to meet their physical, psychological, social, information, and spiritual needs throughout their cancer journey.

**Care coordination** is a comprehensive approach to achieving seamless continuity of care for all patients. It is the responsibility of every clinical and non-clinical professional who works with patients, their families and carers to deliver care coordination so patients can successfully navigate the complex health system.

**Communication** needs of patients, their families and carers is the responsibility of everyone employed in the healthcare system. Good and open communication should exist between oncology and primary health professionals, and between patients and their families. Communication should be regular and timely and it should take into account cultural and language differences.

**Research and clinical trials** play an important role in establishing the efficacy and safety of diagnostic, prognostic and therapeutic interventions, as well as establishing the role of psychological, supportive care and palliative care interventions. Patients should be offered opportunities to participate in clinical trials where appropriate and practical, at any stage of their care pathway.

## Upper GI cancer and related optimal care pathways

Currently, there are OCPs for three types of upper GI cancer:

- hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC – primary liver cancer)
- oesophagogastric cancer (oesophageal and gastric cancer)
- pancreatic cancer

There is also an OCP for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cancer.

## Being informed about your care

An experience of cancer is often complex and it may be confusing. We encourage you to familiarise yourself with your relevant OCP and use it to guide discussions with your healthcare team so you can make informed decisions about what's right for you and have greater confidence and competence to manage your cancer journey.

OCPs are available in their full version or as a quick reference guide. To access them:

1. Visit [cancer.org.au/health-professionals/optimal-cancer-care-pathways](https://cancer.org.au/health-professionals/optimal-cancer-care-pathways)
2. Select either the 'optimal care pathway' tab or the 'quick reference guides' tab
3. Select the relevant cancer care pathway document.

## Pancare's role in developing optimal care pathways

Pancare Foundation participates in the consultative review process to support the delivery of OCPs for upper GI cancers, including pancreatic, liver, stomach, biliary and oesophageal cancers. Pancare also advocates for the inclusion of rare cancers, such as biliary cancers, in future OCPs.

## Where to find out more

For more information about optimal care pathways speak to your healthcare team or contact our Specialist Nurse Support Team on **1300 881 698** or [support@pancare.org.au](mailto:support@pancare.org.au).

Information provided by Pancare Foundation is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, treatment or other health care services. Pancare Foundation may provide information to you about physicians, products, services, clinical trials or treatments related to upper gastrointestinal cancer, but Pancare Foundation does not recommend nor endorse any healthcare resource if not specified.

