

Embargoed 12:00AM AEDT Sunday 11 October 2026

Record one Aussie dies every 57 mins from Upper GI cancers

New research reveals a record one Australian now dies every 57 minutes from upper gastrointestinal (GI) cancers - more than any other cancer group. But it turns out Aussies aren't fully aware of the true dangers.

The new report from the Pancare Foundation and Provocate® comes as hundreds of Australians 'Unite for Hope' in Melbourne today to help raise funds – and the alarm – for upper GI cancers, as well as remember the 25 people whose lives are lost every day. Find out more [here](#).

Upper GI cancers affect organs vital for swallowing, digesting and processing food, controlling glucose and producing hormones and include pancreatic, liver, stomach, oesophageal, and biliary cancers.

Pancare Foundation's Head of Research, Innovation and Advocacy, Dr Mark Buzza, said a doubling and tripling of pancreatic and liver cancer respectively in the past 20 years was behind the shock milestone.

"Upper GI cancers have now surpassed lung cancers as Australia's biggest cancer killer," Dr Buzza said.

"As a result, one Australian now dies every 57 minutes from upper GI cancers – more than any other cancer group. This equates to 25 Australians losing their lives each day from one of these five deadly cancers.

"Upper GI cancers are also now responsible for nearly one-in-five cancer deaths but have received less than one-in-ten cancer research dollars in Australia in recent years.

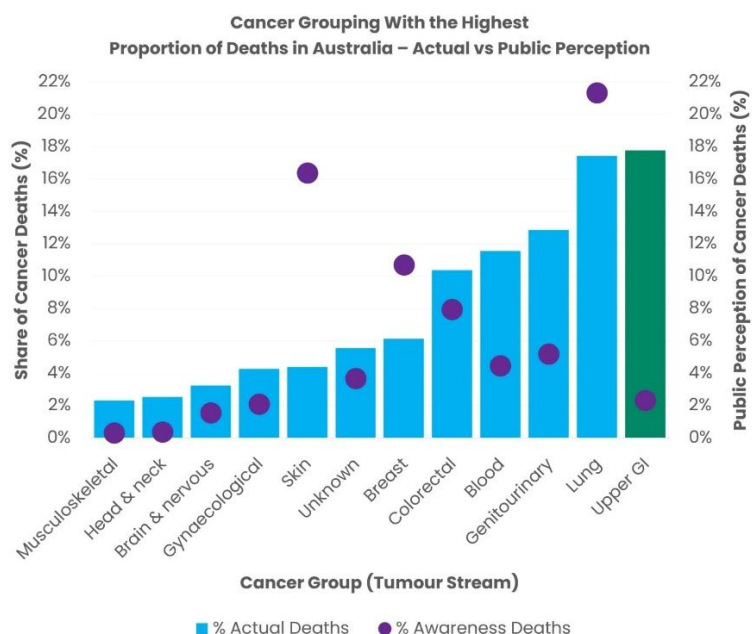
"In our recent national survey, only one-in-fifty Australians (2%) were aware of the true deadliness of upper GI cancers. This should ring alarm bells for governments about the community danger from this silent killer.

"That's why we're encouraging people to know the facts, 'trust their gut' and seek advice from their GP if something doesn't feel right, because early detection and treatment are vital to improving survival."

Upper GI cancers have some of the nation's lowest survival rates, partly due to vague symptoms, such as unexplained weight loss, fatigue and loss of appetite, making them difficult to diagnose early.

Pancare and Provocate®'s new report *Why Upper GI: Australia's new leading cause of cancer deaths*, released today, aims to reset the agenda on how this often overlooked and under-invested group of cancers is prioritised by government and the health sector alike.

Pancare and Provocate® examined two decades of cancer death data using Cancer Australia's tumour streams - the same groupings used to report research funding - and compared this to public awareness via a YouGov poll of over 1000 Australians.



(see page 3 for full data table)

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Report co-author and Provocate® (Prov-o-cate) Managing Director and Founder Troy Bilsborough said upper GI cancer deaths had grown at double the rate of cancer deaths overall the past 10 years and were on track to dominate for decades to come if governments did not urgently intervene.

“Upper GI cancers are responsible for more deaths than any other group of cancers and most of the population is unaware of the scale of the risk. That is the definition of a national public health emergency.

“Yet, as upper GI cancer deaths are rising, we’re seeing government health spend falling. This is going to be a challenge for all cancer funding going forward, and it is important governments recognise the need to increase investment across the board instead of simply trying to redistribute the same pie.”

Provocate® revealed federal health spending actually went backwards \$4 billion last year (2025-26) in the recent Final Federal Budget Outcome – the second time it had fallen since 2022.

Key Facts About upper GI cancers

- **What are upper GI cancers:** Upper gastrointestinal (upper GI) cancers affect the organs involved in swallowing, digestion and nutrient processing, including the pancreas, liver, stomach, oesophagus, gallbladder and bile ducts.
- **Who they affect:** Upper GI cancers can affect anyone, and often occur without obvious early warning signs. As such, they have some of the lowest cancer survival rates in Australia.
- **What to look out for:** Early symptoms can be tough to identify, given they may be non-existent or be mistaken for common digestive issues, such as persistent heartburn or indigestion, ongoing stomach or back pain, unexplained weight loss, difficulty swallowing, jaundice, or changes in appetite.
- **When to act:** If symptoms persist, worsen, or don’t feel right, they should not be ignored. People are encouraged to trust their gut and seek advice from their GP, ask questions, and explore further investigation or referrals if needed.
- **Where you can get help:** An upper GI cancer diagnosis can be extremely challenging for those diagnosed as well as their families. Pancare provides free access to upper GI cancer nursing, counselling, dietetics support, care coordination and peer connection, for people living with upper GI cancers, their carers and their loved ones.
- **Why Pancare:** Pancare Foundation is the only Australian charity dedicated exclusively to transforming upper GI cancer outcomes, combining advocacy, research investment, specialist knowledge, lived-experience insight and practical support to improve awareness, care and outcomes for people affected by these complex and often overlooked cancers. Find out more at www.pancare.org.au.

About Pancare Foundation

Pancare Foundation is Australia’s leading charity dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by upper gastrointestinal (GI) cancers, including pancreatic, liver, stomach, biliary and oesophageal cancers. Founded in 2011, Pancare is committed to providing specialised support programs, counselling services and reliable, evidence-based information to help patients and their families navigate every stage of their cancer experience.

About Provocate®

Provocate® are Australia’s foremost advocacy analysts, with our insights at the heart of the biggest ideas & issues impacting the health of the nation since 2017, with globally award-winning results. This includes the first independent Australian firm to rank in the global Top 20 public relations campaigns (2024-25) and the first-ever Queensland firm to feature in the world’s Top 75 communications innovators. This is thanks to our simple system for tackling the most complex problems: Provoke. Campaign. Communicate®. Let’s Provocate®.

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Table 1. Leading causes of cancer deaths in Australia: Actual vs Awareness		Total Deaths	Actual (%)	Aware (%)	Actual (Rank)	Aware (Rank)
Cancers Overall	e.g. all cancers	52288	100%	100%	Total	Total
Upper gastrointestinal cancers	e.g. pancreatic cancer, liver cancer, stomach cancer	9301	17.8%	2.3%	1	8
Lung cancers	e.g. non-small cell lung cancer, small cell lung cancer, metastatic lung cancer	9119	17.4%	21.3%	2	1
Genitourinary cancers	e.g. prostate cancer, kidney cancer, bladder cancer	6729	12.9%	5.2%	3	5
Haematological (blood) cancers	e.g. leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma	6045	11.6%	4.5%	4	6
Colorectal cancers	e.g. colon cancer, rectal cancer, metastatic bowel cancer	5430	10.4%	8.0%	5	4
Breast cancers	e.g. ductal carcinoma, lobular carcinoma, metastatic breast cancer	3203	6.1%	10.7%	6	3
Cancers of unknown primary	e.g. a cancer that has already spread but doctors cannot identify from where	2910	5.6%	3.7%	7	7
Skin cancers	e.g. melanoma, basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma	2301	4.4%	16.4%	8	2
Gynaecological cancers	e.g. ovarian cancer, cervical cancer, uterine cancer	2238	4.3%	2.1%	9	9
Brain & nervous system cancers	e.g. glioblastoma, astrocytoma, meningioma	1699	3.2%	1.6%	10	10
Head & neck cancers	e.g. throat cancer, mouth/oral cancer, thyroid cancer	1324	2.5%	0.4%	11	11
Musculoskeletal cancers	e.g. osteosarcoma, soft-tissue sarcoma, Ewing sarcoma	1218	2.3%	0.3%	12	12
None of the above				6.8%		
Not sure				16.8%		

Source (Actual Deaths): Analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Cause of Death, Australia (Catalogue No. 3303.0), Table 1.2 — underlying cause of death by sex (registered deaths), reference years 2003–2024. ABS-defined ICD-10 causes have been aligned to clinically relevant tumour streams consistent with Cancer Australia reporting frameworks. Figures for the 12 tumour streams do not sum to the overall cancer total due to exclusions. **Source (Awareness):** Awareness figures are from polling undertaken by YouGov Plc for Pancare Foundation and Provocate® as part of this study. Total sample size was 1015 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th - 10th December 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Australian adults (aged 18+). Cancer category descriptions above reflect what was presented to poll respondents.