

Media release

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Cancer is on the rise. But is it all bad? Award winning Australian Cancer Atlas doubles down on the digits

New data highlights removing substantive geographical disparities will save lives.

Cancer Council Queensland, in collaboration with QUT, has officially released an update to the Australian Cancer Atlas. This update includes the latest national data on how cancer diagnosis and excess death rates vary by geographical area across Australia.

The update means the Atlas will now provide users with details about the geographical patterns in cancer diagnoses and excess deaths across Australia from 2007-2016.

The Australian Cancer Atlas has highlighted substantive differences in cancer survival in Australia. We estimated that removing these geographical disparities **could save over 1300 lives per year, or 4% of all cancer deaths occurring within 5 years of diagnosis.**

Additionally, for the first time, the Australian Cancer Atlas now includes information on geographical patterns of classic myeloproliferative neoplasms, or MPNs, a rare group of blood cancers.

The Australian Cancer Atlas is an interactive online resource helping researchers, members of the community, medical professionals and policy makers understand how the cancer burden varies by small geographical areas across Australia. It is a collaborative project between Cancer Council Queensland and QUT.

The Atlas enables users to easily visualise those differences and offers critical insight into how the patterns of cancer and outcomes in Australia vary depending on where people live, which can be used to drive research priorities and policies going forward.

This gives health agencies and policy makers a better understanding of geographic disparities and health requirements across the country.

Last year the Australian Cancer Atlas achieved national industry recognition through the JK Barrie Award for Overall Excellence by the Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute, the national peak body for the spatial information industry.

A free methodology e-book is also now available on the Atlas website (under 'resources') that provides a detailed, practical guide for epidemiologists, statisticians and other researchers interested in developing a cancer atlas. The methods focus on the Bayesian spatial models and details of the novel visualisations.

Since the Atlas's launch in September 2018, the Australian Cancer Atlas has had over 47,600 active users and nearly 600 downloads of the geographical results. Researchers in New Zealand and The Netherlands are currently utilising the same methods to generate similar national cancer atlases.

Cancer Council Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) have received funding through an ARC Linkage Grant for the next three years to develop additional statistical models to be used in the Australian Cancer Atlas.

This funding boost helps Cancer Council Queensland develop the next phase of the Australian Cancer Atlas. This will include examining how the geographical patterns change over time, additional measures of cancer burden, and more innovative ways of communicating that to the users of the Atlas.

Cancer Council Queensland Researcher Professor Peter Baade said the charity was pleased to be releasing these new updates to the Atlas.

“The Australian Cancer Atlas has already proven itself to be an invaluable resource and benefit to many Australians, gaining industry, scientific and community acclaim. By updating the data contained in the Atlas ensures it remains relevant and provides a great foundation for the next phase of development.”

MPN survivor Jolanda Visser from the MPN Alliance Australia said that she was pleased to hear about the addition of statistics on classic myeloproliferative neoplasms to the Atlas.

The team at MPN Alliance Australia generously donated \$10,000 to support the inclusion of the MPN data in the Australia Cancer Atlas. These funds were raised through a major fundraising dinner held in 2019.

“Having looked at the Atlas and seeing that we can retrieve MPN stats is making me feel very good,” said Ms Visser.

“It is exciting that patients like me will be able to look at this information about MPN in their local area.”

Co-lead on the Australian Cancer Atlas, the Distinguished Professor Kerrie Mengersen from the Queensland University of Technology said the latest edition would greatly benefit the Queensland community.

“The Australian Cancer Atlas is a shining example of what can be achieved by combining cross-institutional expertise in statistics, e-research and cancer,” said Professor Mengersen.

“This collaboration is inspiring since it not only benefits our community but also leads to new knowledge and new research.”

For more information on the Australian Cancer Atlas, please visit, atlas.cancer.org.au.

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