

Macmillan's 2015 General Election calls

Why cancer matters in 2015

The UK is facing a cancer crisis. By the end of the next Government's term in 2020, almost 1 in 2 people will receive a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime. While the majority of these will receive a good standard of care, sadly this isn't the case for everyone. Macmillan is calling on the next Government to tackle this looming crisis in care.

Cancer survival rates in the UK are among the worst in Europe – not least because thousands of people are diagnosed too late. And many thousands more are treated with a lack of compassion or denied the right to die where they want.

If the current system is struggling to ensure everyone receives a good standard of care now, how will it cope as the number of people diagnosed with cancer grows by half a million over the next 5 years?

Next year's General Election is an opportunity to make sure the next Government tackles this looming crisis. Without urgent action, we will continue to fail people with cancer.

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Macmillan Cancer Support is calling on all parties to make three commitments in their manifestos to improve the lives of people affected by cancer.

1. The next Government should commit to deliver cancer outcomes that match the best in Europe by the end of the next Parliament.

To improve the UK's cancer outcomes, we are calling for:

- Improved referral
- Reduced inequalities, for example, improving the care of older people
- More effective commissioning of cancer care through all levels of the NHS
- Greater focus on secondary preventative measures, such as physical activity
- Patients to be given appropriate support to recover following treatment

A recent major study of more than 29 European countries found survival rates for almost all common cancers are worse in Britain than the European average.

The next Government can and must change this. Nearly 1 in 3 people with cancer in the UK die within one year of diagnosis, suggesting many are diagnosed too late. And too many cancer patients, especially older people, do not get the best possible treatment and care. Many patients also feel abandoned after their treatment ends.

To ensure that people with cancer in the UK receive care and treatment that matches the very best in Europe it is crucial that they are diagnosed at the earliest opportunity, able to access the best treatment that is right for them, irrespective of their age or where they live and are properly supported once their treatment has finished to recover more quickly and improve their quality of life.

Every level of the NHS must also ensure that the right structures are in place to guarantee that cancer services are effectively commissioned. These services need to include appropriate support to recover following treatment and there needs to be an emphasis on secondary preventative measures.

2. The next Government should commit to ensure that all cancer patients are treated with the highest levels of dignity and respect and NHS staff should be supported to deliver this ambition.

To improve patient experience, we are calling for:

- Benchmarking of performance on cancer patient experience to be published
- All trusts to be required to publish action plans to address weaknesses
- The Macmillan Values Based Standard to be incorporated into CQC inspections
- The measurement and improvement of staff experience to be prioritised in the NHS
- Staff to be given the time and training to provide a good experience and to reflect on the emotional impact of caring

Almost 1 in 5 cancer patients say they are treated as a 'set of symptoms' rather than as a person, and more than 2 in 5 said doctors or nurses sometimes failed to ask what name they would like to be called whilst in hospital.

Evidence suggests this is linked to unhappy staff. In hospitals where staff experience discrimination and are not valued, people with cancer are up to 18 times more likely to receive poor care.

All organisations across the health service must take decisive steps to deliver a better patient experience as soon as possible. NHS leaders must treat patient experience and clinical outcomes with parity of esteem and recognise that both good patient and staff experience are vital for good clinical outcomes.

3. The next Government should commit to ensuring everyone at the end of life is given free social care to support them to spend their final weeks and days in the place of their choosing.

To support people to die in a place of their choosing, we are calling for:

- Free social care for people at the end of life
- A package of health support to help people die in a place of their choosing

With the right support, almost 3 in 4 people with cancer would prefer to die at home – but less than one-third are able to. It's a sad reality that far too many people are denied their dying wish.

In order for people to spend their final weeks and days in the place of their choosing, the government needs to ensure that they receive a comprehensive package of support, including free social care. A series of experts have looked into this, most recently the Barker Commission, and consensus is that the artificial division between 'health' care needs and 'social' care needs must be removed, especially for those at the end of their lives.

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