

Background

Improving access, experience and outcomes for people with cancer who also have other long-term conditions is a key objective within Macmillan's 2025-2030 strategy. The interplay between cancer and long-term conditions can be difficult to navigate for people living with cancer, the healthcare professionals who support them, and the health and care systems that are set up to manage diseases separately. Macmillan worked in partnership with The Strategy Unit to understand the literature around how having two or more conditions (one being cancer) might affect people's diagnosis, treatment, quality of life and overarching experiences.

Methodology

The review followed a Quick Scoping Review (QSR) approach, designed to balance breadth, rigour, and timeliness. It prioritised breadth over depth—aiming to map the range of relevant literature rather than analysis of individual sources. Scoping searches were conducted in November 2024. The population of interest was adults with cancer (or those living beyond cancer) who also had at least one other long-term condition. Long-term conditions include:

- Physical or mental health conditions of long duration, e.g. diabetes, schizophrenia, or infectious disease.
- Ongoing conditions, such as learning disability.
- Symptom complexes, such as frailty or chronic pain.
- Sensory impairment, such as sight or hearing loss.
- Alcohol or substance misuse.

Results

Three databases were searched: Medline, Health Management Information Consortium (HMIC) and Social Policy and Practice (SP&P).

Due to the volume of papers found by the search (8,440), we focused on review articles or articles within UK settings. One hundred and twenty-three (123) articles were included in the final analysis. The literature review categorised possible explanations into three main categories: patient, clinician and system

Possible explanations for differences in diagnosis include... 	Possible explanations for differences in treatment include... 	Possible explanations for differences in quality of life include... 
• Misattribution of symptoms and distraction by severe and complex conditions by patients and clinicians (diagnostic overshadowing) • Cognitive impairment, frailty and mental health can hinder symptom recognition, communication and lead to professionals being less likely to investigate or refer people for cancer tests • Monitoring of chronic conditions and familiarity with health systems providing opportunities for diagnosis	• Limited curative treatment options due to late diagnosis resulting from pre-existing long-term conditions • Long-term conditions impacting quality of life which changes patient priorities and clinician recommendations • Treatment burden, physical limitations and cognitive decline influence treatment decisions and adherence • Limited clinical trial information and guidelines on treatments for people with similar combinations of conditions	• Self-management capacity impacted by internal resources (e.g. self-efficacy) and external resources (e.g. support networks) • Disengagement due to healthcare practices that feel complex, ineffective, disruptive to daily routines, fragmented and poorly coordinated • Compounded impact of cancer and long-term conditions on quality of life • Some GPs lacking cancer-specific expertise and some oncologists lacking experience managing chronic illnesses

Recommendations

Following the literature review, Macmillan has created recommendations for health and care professionals to help improve experiences for people with cancer and other long-term conditions:

- Ensure universal access to personalised, holistic needs assessments and care planning
- Improve information and resources to support self-management and shared decision-making to ensure choices reflect individual preferences and circumstances
- Provide navigation support to help people to manage the additional burden of multiple systems of treatment, care and support
- Tailor information and resources to meet the specific needs of older people and those with cognitive or mental health conditions

