

World Cancer Day: The Power of the Public Voice for Progress in Cancer

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In 2020, World Cancer Day will celebrate its 20th anniversary. The occasion comes at the start of a new decade, a ripe opportunity for the global cancer community to dig deeper into what people around the world think, feel, and believe about cancer.

To mark this milestone, the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) commissioned an international survey of more than 15,000 people in 20 countries to explore their views, opinions, and attitudes toward cancer. This initiative, the International Public Opinion Survey on Cancer,¹ is one of the only multicountry studies of its kind to be conducted in the past decade. To be released on World Cancer Day, the report by UICC highlights findings from the survey, which asked members of the public questions that covered five core areas: their personal experience with cancer, their concern level, their awareness of cancer risk factors, their behavior to address and limit their cancer risk, and what actions they believe governments should take to tackle cancer within their country.

What We Achieved

The past two decades have seen a number of encouraging developments in cancer research, particularly in the areas of treatment and diagnosis. Take, for example, the innovation emerging from immune checkpoint inhibitors,² which is helping to vastly improve patient survival rates. Coupled with this is greater access to medicines in countries that were traditionally unable to afford life-saving medicine. This is in part thanks to the update of the WHO essential medicines list, which included more cancer medicines in 2019.³ The international community continues to make inroads in improving affordability when it comes to cancer medicines, which came into focus in a technical report produced in 2018.⁴ The past decade has seen the adoption of the World Health Assembly cancer resolution⁵ in 2017, which acknowledges the global concern about cancer and highlights the actions that world leaders should take.

More effective diagnostic and treatment technologies have also improved early detection of multiple types of cancers. National and international policies are being shaped by a broader group, including the medical and research communities; civil society; international organizations; and perhaps most importantly, patients

and their caregivers. We witnessed an enthusiastic appetite for multidisciplinary, multisectorial, and international collaborations that included the voices of physicians, pathologists, oncologists, therapists, psycho-oncologists, nurses, community and social workers, palliative caregivers, economists, and others, offering multidimensional solutions focused on the needs of patients and their families.

Efforts in prevention have taken great strides. As an example, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control⁶ interventions were adopted, leading to a marked decrease in tobacco consumption in countries where the treaty was applied. The WHO also launched two main initiatives to eliminate cervical cancer⁷ and to address childhood cancer.⁸ Together with our increasing understanding of health economics and the development of universal health coverage, the path forward is made clearer.

Why Is It Important to Understand the Public's Point of View?

In our efforts to control cancer, we have produced an abundance of science, data, policies, recommendations, and guidelines as well as sought to raise public awareness and change behavior. However, we cannot expect any of the recommendations to be truly adopted, effect change, or resonate widely if we do not understand what the public believes and how it feels and acts.


Insights on cancer from the public at this scale are rare. We sought to fill the gap as a first step in supporting policymakers and communicators to design more effective strategies and programs, provoke engagement with the public, and improve outreach initiatives. It is also our hope that this survey will inspire more localized research, providing a jumping off point for countries themselves to gather greater insight.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was deployed exclusively online. Weighting was used to balance demographics and to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to the most recent country census data and provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The questionnaire was deployed through the Ipsos Global Advisor in the period between October 25 and November 25, 2019. A total of 15,427 adults from 20 countries were surveyed

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online, representing all geographic regions, and spanned high- (55%), upper-middle- (25%), and lower-middle- (20%) income countries. The surveyed countries were Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bolivia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States. Approximately 1,000 individuals participated from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Spain, and the United States. Approximately 500 individuals participated from the remaining countries. Respondents were age 18-74 years in the United States and Canada and 16-74 years in all other countries. In addition, we obtained demographic data such as sex, age, household income, level of education, and employment status of the surveyed people.

The precision of the online survey is calculated using a credibility interval. For a Global Advisor survey, a sample of 1,000 is accurate to ± 3.5 percentage points. A survey of a sample of 500 is accurate to ± 4.5 percentage points in each country's general population.

The study has a few limitations. Nine of the 20 countries surveyed (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Spain, Sweden, and the United States) generated nationally representative samples. The other countries (Bolivia, Brazil, China, India, Israel [Jewish population only], Kenya, Mexico, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Turkey) produced a national sample that is more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population, and the results should be viewed as reflecting the views of a more "connected" population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of

error, including, but not limited to, coverage error and measurement error.

Key Findings

An analysis across multiple data points allowed us to compare responses across regions, countries, and country income settings. Demographic data, including sex, age, household income, and education status, also helped to contrast responses and draw similarities across different demographic groups. Table 1 lists the key findings.

What the People Are Telling Us

Across all age, education, and household income levels, almost 60% of people surveyed feel concerned that they themselves will develop or redevelop cancer within their lifetime. This is an important figure that cannot, and should not, be neglected.

Globally, people surveyed seem to be quite aware of the cancer risk factors. On balance, tobacco use comes out as the most recognized cancer risk factor (63%), followed by exposure to harmful ultraviolet rays (54%) and exposure to tobacco smoke from others (50%).

One particular finding that stood out is that younger people surveyed (those < 35 years old) are less likely to recognize tobacco use as a cancer risk factor than those > 50 years old. It shows us that the international cancer community must not take for granted that public health messages are being driven home to every new generation.

Does awareness translate to behavior change? In this case, the answer is not so clear. Close to 7 in 10 people indicated that they did something to reduce their risk of cancer in the past 12 months, which means that nearly a quarter of people

TABLE 1. Key Findings From the International Public Opinion Survey on Cancer

Topic	Results
Concern	Globally, almost 60% expressed that they were concerned or very concerned about cancer, regardless of age, income, or education level. Women seem more concerned than men that they will develop cancer in their lifetime by 7 percentage points (62% v 55%).
Awareness	Tobacco use was clearly ranked first as the most recognized activity to increase a person's risk of getting cancer. A lack of exercise and exposure to certain viruses are among the least recognized cancer risk factors. Young people (age < 35 years) seem less likely to recognize tobacco use and second-hand smoke as cancer risk factors than those age > 50 years. Across all countries, individuals from lower-income households appear less likely to recognize cancer risk factors than those from higher-income households. In all areas except tobacco use, this trend can also be seen when comparing people who have not completed a university education with those with university educations.
Behavior change	Seven in 10 people, or 69%, say that they have taken steps to reduce their cancer risk in the past 12 months. The most common behavior change, indicated by 3 in 10 people, is increasing consumption of healthy foods. Across the board, people who have completed a university education or are from a higher income bracket appear more likely than the general population to have changed their behavior in the past 12 months.
Government action	The majority of people express that governments should take steps when it comes to cancer, with 3% signaling that they do not believe governments should do anything with regard to cancer. Making cancer treatment more affordable ranked as the most important governmental measure, with 1 (33%) in 3 people believing this. Alongside making cancer services more affordable, almost one third (28%) believe that governments should support and fund research. One (25%) in 4 believe that investing in infrastructure is a priority activity for governments, and the same number believe that governments should ensure equal access to cancer care for everyone. Raising public awareness and improving education were also considered among the top priority government measures.

say that they had not taken any measures to reduce their cancer risk within the past 12 months. Additional insights into the real and perceived barriers to taking preventive action should help to shape more effective strategies and empathetic public messaging to reduce resistance to behavior change.

The survey results also show that awareness levels are lower among socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. Whatever the country you live in, if you are less educated or earn less money, then you are less likely to be aware of cancer risk factors and less likely to take action to reduce your own cancer risk.

Of note, people clearly indicate that they expect governments to take action. Some of the most important measures that people believe governments should be acting on include making cancer treatment and services more affordable (33%), supporting and funding cancer research (28%), investing in infrastructure (25%), ensuring equal access to cancer care for everyone (25%), and raising public awareness and improving education (24%).

However, different perspectives emerge at the country level. That is important to note for policymakers and advocates. For

instance, for individuals surveyed in China, improvement of air quality is seen as priority in combatting cancer, whereas for people surveyed in India, regulation of tobacco was seen as most important, and for those in Kenya, India, and South Africa, public awareness efforts were among the top three priorities.

The Way Forward

We are 10 years away from the targets of the 2030 global Sustainable Development Goals,⁹ and the next 10 is our chance to make change happen. The 20th anniversary of World Cancer Day comes at the start of this decade filled with promise, giving us a chance to look both forward and back and to reflect on and celebrate the incredible progress we have made.¹⁰

Today, on World Cancer Day, we have a responsibility to move forward with re-invigorated ambition and to transform what we know into action. Listening to people's voices as we have with this global survey is crucial to bridging gaps, to saving lives in the present, and to taking strides for the future so that the next decade is one of profound and tremendous progress—for everyone, everywhere.

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AUTHORS' DISCLOSURES OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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Open Payments is a public database containing information reported by companies about payments made to US-licensed physicians (Open Payments).

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