

 **Minimise Cancer**
Maximise Lives



Understanding Cancer in Singapore: Insights across National Reports

By Singapore Cancer Society
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Cancer Trends, Explained

Cancer remains the number one cause of death in Singapore – but dig deeper into the data and a slightly nuanced picture emerges, marked by both progress and emerging concerns. While cancer continues to affect 1 in 4 Singapore residents in their lifetime, there has also been remarkable progress, with five-year survival rates more than tripling in the last five decades.

In *Understanding Cancer in Singapore: Insights Across National Reports*, Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) brings together key insights from trusted health data sources to help Singapore residents understand how health and cancer trends are evolving – and what this means for them across prevention, screening and living well after cancer.

Data Sources

Understanding Cancer in Singapore primarily draws on the **National Population Health Survey 2024 (NPHS)**, which tracks nation-wide patterns in lifestyle, chronic diseases and screening uptake, and the **Singapore Cancer Registry Annual Report 2023 (SCR)**, which reports long-term trends in cancer incidence, mortality and survival. These are also complemented by *Singapore's Approach to Cancer* – released by the Ministry of Health in January 2026 – outlining Singapore's prevention-to-survivorship strategy and the key risk factors driving the cancer burden locally.

What To Know About Cancer, Today

1. **Progress:** Cancer is on the rise, but survival has more than tripled.
2. **Prevention:** Nearly 1 in 3 of Singapore's cancer burden could be prevented, reflecting the importance of addressing modifiable risks.
3. **Screening Gaps:** Just between 35 – 45% of eligible residents go for regular cancer screenings, suggesting room for improvement.
4. **Specific cancers:** Late-stage diagnoses for lung, prostate and cervical cancers are a concern.
5. **Younger Adults:** Worrying rise in cancer incidence among younger adults under 50.

Insight #1

**Cancer is on the
rise, but survival
has more than
tripled**

Cancer continues to be #1 cause of death in Singapore

50 diagnosed every day

17 deaths every day

26.2% of deaths each year

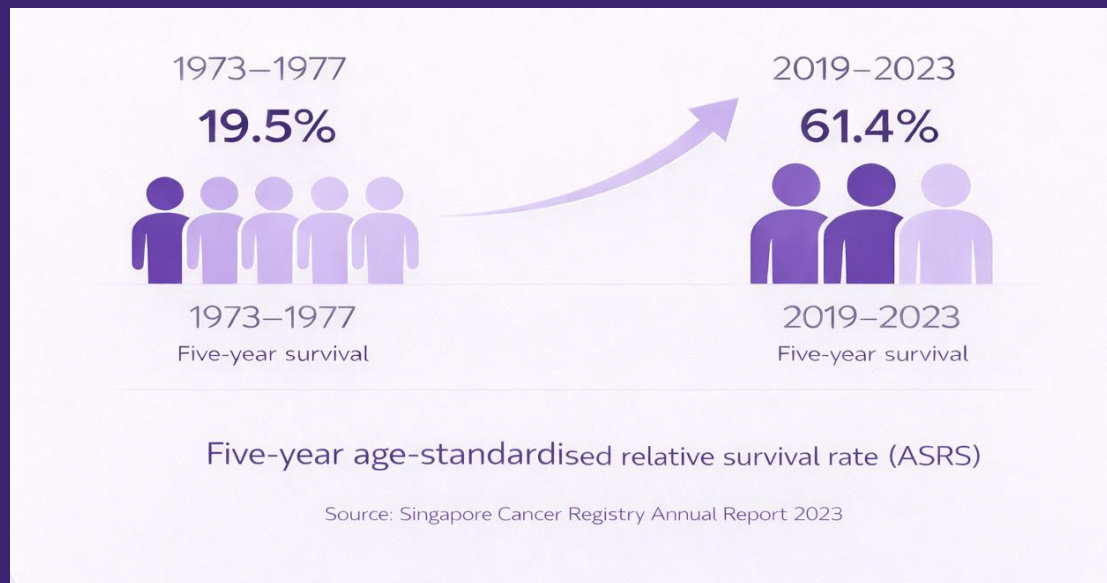


1 in 4
Singapore residents
at risk of developing
cancer by 75

Cancer incidence continues to rise, driven in part by Singapore's ageing population. 1 in 4 Singapore residents may develop cancer by 75 and the disease accounts for more than a quarter of all deaths.

But Singapore has made real progress in survival

Five-year cancer survival rates have more than tripled over 50 years



Singapore's five-year cancer survival rate has more than tripled in the last 50 years – from 19.5% in the 1970s to 61.4% today.

This means that **2 in 3 people are now surviving at least five years after a diagnosis.**

This dramatic improvement is likely due to advances in awareness, treatment, and supportive care.

We're living longer We also need to live better

As more people survive beyond cancer, **survivorship quality** has become a key focus for Singapore – ensuring individuals can live well with, and beyond cancer. Survivorship is also one of the five thrusts under *Singapore's Approach to Cancer*, released by the Ministry of Health in January 2026.

Cancer affects many aspects of life, including physical health, emotional wellbeing, and social participation. **Community support** is thus vital in helping cancer survivors rebuild their lives and return to normalcy – whether within their families, in workplaces, and the wider community.

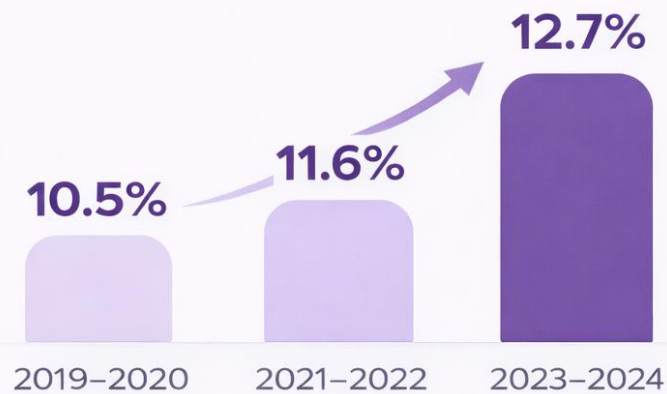
Survivors must also have access to **quality care services** like rehabilitation, psychosocial support and financial assistance to support long-term recovery and wellbeing.

Insight #2

**Nearly 1 in 3 of
Singapore's cancer
burden could be
prevented**

Lifestyle factors key in fight against cancer – but obesity is a watch area

Obesity rates are rising



↑ +2.2 percentage points in four years

Source: National Population Health Survey

According to the Ministry of Health's *Singapore's Approach to Cancer*, **one-third (32.8%) of the cancer burden is attributable to modifiable risk factors** such as tobacco use and unhealthy diets.

Obesity alone accounts for 4.3% of cancer burden. And yet, obesity rates have risen from 10.5% in 2019 – 2020 to 12.7% in 2023 – 2024. This may represent a broader shift toward more sedentary lifestyles.

Healthy living matters in long-term cancer control

Excess body weight has been recognised as a risk factor for several common cancers including breast and colorectal cancers.

This points to the importance of **healthy living and preventive health** as a critical component of long-term cancer control. *Singapore's Approach to Cancer* also specifically highlights the critical need to address "modifiable risk factors" that contribute to avoidable cancers.

In this context, the national Healthier SG strategy, which aims to strengthen preventive care through healthier lifestyles and screenings, represents a positive step in addressing cancer risk factors and other chronic diseases.

Insight #3

**Screening rates
have room for
improvement**

Less than half of eligible residents screen for cancer

Breast Cancer Screening Rates

35.2%

Women 50-69 years

Cervical Cancer Screening Rates

44.9%

Women 25-74 years

Colorectal Cancer Screening Rates

44.9%

Residents 50-74 years

Despite the availability of national screening programmes, **only 35 to 45% of eligible Singapore residents undergo regular screenings** for breast, colorectal and cervical cancers.

By comparison, several OECD countries have achieved screening coverage levels of between 60 to 70% or higher, indicating that Singapore has room for improvement.

While screening awareness has increased over the years, current screening rates suggests that awareness alone is not enough. There is a need to understand the **practical and behavioral barriers** that prevent people from turning awareness into action.

Insight #4

**Late-stage diagnoses
for lung, prostate
& cervical cancers a
concern**

Positive trends in early-stage diagnoses for breast and liver cancers



Breast Cancer

**>3 in 4 cases
detected at an
early stage**



Liver Cancer (among men)

**>1 in 2 cases
detected at an
early stage**

Detecting cancer early matters. It can save lives, reduce treatment intensity, lower medical costs and preserve the quality of life. The good news is Singapore is seeing an increase in early-stage detection for certain cancers.

More than 7 in 10 breast cancer cases were diagnosed at early stages throughout 2003 – 2023, with a slight improvement to over 3 in 4 cases in recent years. Liver cancer in males showed the biggest improvement in all cancers with early detection nearly doubling between 2003 – 2007 to 2013 – 2017. At present, over half of liver cancer cases are detected at early stages in males (2019 – 2023).

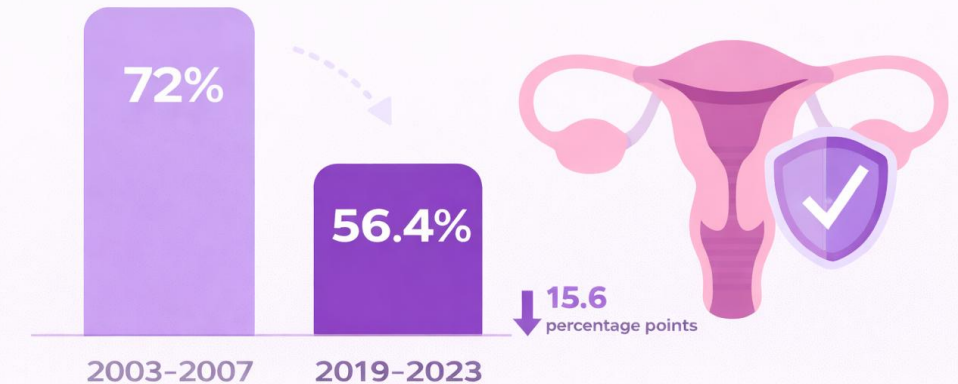
However, late diagnoses of lung, prostate and cervical cancers are concerns

Lung cancer is among the top 3 most diagnosed cancers for both men and women in Singapore. Yet, most cases continue to be diagnosed at advanced stages, accounting for 77.7% of male cases and 68.9% of female cases.

While **cervical cancer** is considered one of the most preventable cancers, **early-stage diagnoses have dropped significantly** from 72% in 2003 – 2007 to 56.4% in 2019 – 2023. This means a larger share of women are being diagnosed at a later stage, despite the availability of a national cervical screening programme.

In addition, over half (54.8%) of **prostate cancers** are diagnosed at a late stage, up from 36.4% in 2018–2022.

Early-stage diagnoses of cervical cancer fell 15.6 percentage points over two decades



Trends underscore importance of screening and risk awareness

Trends in late-stage diagnoses point to the continued need to **encourage screening participation**. As part of its global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer, the World Health Organization has set a target for 70% of women to be screened by ages 35 and 45. Singapore falls below this with less than half of eligible residents undergoing cervical cancer screening (44.9%), suggesting much room for improvement.

Lung and prostate cancers are not part of Singapore's national population-based screening programme. Timely detection therefore depends on individuals being **aware of symptoms and their risk factors** – such as smoking and family history – and seeking medical attention early so doctors can assess their risk and recommend appropriate referrals or investigations.

Insight #5

**Worrying rise in
cancer incidence
among younger
adults**

Sharpest rise in cancer incidence among under-50s

The Fastest Increase in Cancer Incidence Rate Over The Last Decade



+15.5%

men in their 30s



+25.3%

women in their 40s

Most common cancers

1. Lymphoid neoplasms
2. Testis
3. Colorectal
4. Nasopharynx
5. Thyroid

1. Breast
2. Uterus
3. Thyroid
4. Colorectal
5. Ovary

While cancer remains predominantly a disease of the elderly (77.4% of male cases and 61% of female cases occur in those above 60), the **most rapid increases in incidence are among younger adults** – particularly men in their 30s and women in their 40s.

Care delivery must take into account life stages

The needs and aspirations of younger cancer patients differ from those of older adults. Care delivery should be designed with **life stage considerations** in mind, including age-appropriate support materials and targeted programmes that address issues like return to work and normalcy, caregiving responsibilities, and family support – including for children and youth.

The Role of Singapore Cancer Society

These findings point to a shifting cancer landscape in Singapore – with rising incidence among younger adults, gaps in screening and early detection, and a growing number of people living with and beyond cancer. Addressing these challenges requires a whole-of-society approach.

As a voice for the cancer community since 1964, Singapore Cancer Society plays a complementary role within the national cancer ecosystem. We deliver person-centred, holistic and community-anchored cancer support – across prevention, survivorship, and end-of-life care. Working alongside healthcare institutions, policymakers and community partners, SCS rallies Singapore to stand with those affected by cancer in our shared mission **to minimise cancer and maximise lives.**



**Minimise Cancer
Maximise Lives**

30 Hospital Boulevard, NCCS Building, #16-02, Singapore 168583
www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg | enquiry@singaporecancersociety.org.sg