CANADIAN PARTNERSHIP AGAINST CANCER

Lung cancer screening progress in Canada

Executive summary

NOVEMBER 2026

A turning point for early detection

For decades, lung cancer has remained Canada's deadliest cancer, claiming more lives than any other type of cancer and disproportionately affecting First Nations, Inuit, Métis, rural, remote and other populations experiencing inequities. Recognizing the need for earlier screening, the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (the Partnership) has been a key driver in advancing lung cancer screening across the country, helping move lung cancer screening from evidence to implementation faster than any previous cancer screening program in Canadian history.

A national effort is changing the story

The Partnership has played a pivotal role in turning evidence into action on lung cancer screening across Canada. Since landmark evidence emerged in 2011 demonstrating the effectiveness of screening, the Partnership has worked with provinces, territories and health system partners to build readiness, strengthen the case for implementation and accelerate the development of organized screening programs nationwide.

The Partnership played a critical convening, catalyzing and knowledge-brokering role by facilitating collaboration, sharing evidence and practical learnings and enabling provinces and territories to learn from one another as well as from other international partners. This national approach has helped accelerate progress, enabling jurisdictions to move farther and faster than they could alone.

In 2020, the Partnership accelerated the expansion of lung cancer screening through funding for program development, community engagement and clinical process development. Seven provinces now offer lung cancer screening, while implementation planning continues across four additional provinces and territories. In less than a decade, lung cancer screening has reached most jurisdictions, reflecting faster progress than historical rollout of other cancer screening programs.

The Partnership's investment has helped create the conditions for rapid implementation while advancing equity-focused approaches, strengthening smoking cessation supports and establishing quality indicators.

Why lung cancer screening matters

The case for screening is compelling.

Historically, about 70 per cent of lung cancers were diagnosed at advanced stages, when treatment options are limited and survival outcomes are poor. The difference that stage at diagnosis makes is profound: more than 60 per cent of people diagnosed with lung cancer at the earliest stage survive at least five years, compared with only about three per cent diagnosed at the most advanced stage.

Finding lung cancers earlier can change everything.

Lung cancer screening using low-dose CT scans helps find cancer in people at high-risk for lung cancer before symptoms appear and before the disease advances. It improves the likelihood of successful treatment, reduces the complexity of care and has the potential to ease the growing economic burden associated with lung cancer.

Early results show promising impact

Although programs are still relatively new, the first signals from across Canada are encouraging.

Screening programs are finding cancers earlier in people at high risk for the disease. Approximately 60 per cent of lung cancers detected through screening are being diagnosed at the earliest stage, and only about 10 per cent of screen-detected cancers are identified at the most advanced stage. In contrast, most lung cancers diagnosed outside of screening are found at later stages, when treatment options may be more limited.

Beyond clinical outcomes, jurisdictions are working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to ensure that screening programs are culturally safer, community informed and reflect the priorities of the communities.

Reaching more people

While progress has been substantial, the work is far from finished.

Modelling demonstrates that increasing screening participation could significantly reduce lung cancer deaths and allow more people to live longer because cancer is found earlier. At the same time, continuing to integrate smoking cessation support into screening programs can further reduce future cancer incidence and mortality.

Persistent gaps in data collection, particularly among populations experiencing inequities, highlight the need for continued investment and action. Better data, stronger equity measures and sustained engagement with communities will be essential to ensuring all eligible people can benefit from screening.

What comes next

Canada has demonstrated that coordinated investment, national leadership and cross-sector collaboration can accelerate meaningful health system change. The next phase is about spread and scale: continuing implementation across provinces and territories, increasing system capacity, continuing to embed smoking cessation support into cancer screening and care programs, improving equity and building the data systems needed to measure long-term outcomes.

If these efforts continue, screening has the potential to transform how lung cancer is diagnosed and treated in Canada, identifying cancer earlier, improving survival and quality of life, and reducing the burden of the disease for future generations.

Quick facts on lung cancer screening

- **Lung cancer remains Canada's deadliest cancer.** Lung cancer is still the leading cause of cancer death in Canada, accounting for roughly one in five cancer deaths.
- **Lung cancer screening can change outcomes.** Lung cancer screening plays a critical role in finding disease earlier, improving the likelihood of successful and timely treatment, and reducing the complexity of care.
- **Lung cancer screening is expanding rapidly across Canada.** Seven provinces now offer lung cancer screening, with additional jurisdictions continuing implementation planning.
- **Lung cancer screening is one of Canada's fastest-implemented cancer screening programs.** In less than a decade, lung cancer screening has reached most provinces, reflecting faster progress than historical rollout of other cancer screening programs.
- **Screening programs do more than find cancer.** Screening programs also connect participants with smoking cessation supports and appropriate follow-up care based on their needs.
- **Participation matters.** Modelling shows that increasing screening participation is a major driver of improved outcomes for people in Canada.
- **Equity must remain a priority.** People with lower income and people who live in rural and remote communities experience inequities in lung cancer risk, access to care and outcomes.
- **National collaboration has accelerated progress.** Since 2020, the Partnership has catalyzed progress through coordinated investments, shared tools, common quality indicators and knowledge exchange which has helped speed implementation across the country.
- **The work isn't finished.** The next opportunity is ensuring more eligible people participate in screening, strengthening equity-focused approaches and improving data collection to measure outcomes and address gaps in access.

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