



Section 1 » Introduction

The mandate of the BC Cancer Agency (BCCA) is to provide and support cancer control services to British Columbia residents. This mandate includes the entire spectrum of cancer control, from prevention, screening and early detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, palliation and end of life care. Using clinical knowledge and evidence the BCCA develops management guidelines for cancer care and distributes them to health care professionals across the province. The BCCA also delivers services alone, and in conjunction with the five regional health authorities and networks of professionals throughout BC. The BCCA is recognized as a leader in population-based cancer control through care and research. British Columbia has some excellent cancer survival rates, thanks to strong partnerships across the province.

Research suggests that 50 percent of cancers are potentially preventable [1]. Improvement in lifestyle and reduction in risk factors requires public education. Primary prevention programs encourage people to remain healthy by educating them to avoid the main risk factors that are known to increase cancer risk. Social policies developed from the viewpoint of health determinants can foster an environment in which healthy behaviours are easier and are encouraged. Some of the key recognised risk factors are alcohol consumption, obesity, physical inactivity, poor nutrition and tobacco use. By applying evidence-based models to address the complex needs of BC communities, the prevention programs aim to reduce these primary preventable risk factors and build community capacity to reduce the incidence of cancer in the province.

Screening can identify precursors of cancer, the treatment of which can reduce the risk of developing cancer. As well, screening enables detection of cancer at an early stage, prior to the development of symptoms, facilitating early more effective treatment. Although a number of potential cancer screening tests have been developed, only a few have been found to be effective and therefore recommended for defined populations. BCCA operates several screening programs: 1) Cervical Cancer Screening Program (CCSP), 2) Screening Mammography Program (SMPBC) and 3) Colon Check. In addition, the Hereditary Cancer Program (HCP), a program for counselling and testing of individuals potentially at high risk of heritable cancer, is also operated by the BCCA.

Despite two decades of continuing reductions in age-standardized mortality rates the population burden of cancer continues to rise as a result of increases in the number of British Columbians over the age of 65; the demographic most likely to be diagnosed with cancer. Improvements must continue to be made to mitigate the effect of population demographics on the burden from cancer in BC. The BCCA, regional HAs, community services and caregivers strive to work together to deliver the most appropriate care as close to home as possible. Networks such as the Communities Oncology Network, Family Practice Oncology Network and Surgical Oncology Network provide support, standards and guidelines for physicians and nurses across the province, resulting in excellent survival rates.