

**Globally 9.3 million deaths occurred due to cancer in 2018. Currently, India has 13.9 lakh cancer cases, which are estimated to increase by 12% by the year 2025. Treatment of cancer inflicts a heavy cost of care and may even impoverish households.**

With the ongoing demographic and epidemiological transition, cancer is emerging as a major public health concern in India. This paper uses nationally representative household survey to examine the overall prevalence and economic burden of cancer in India. The age-standardized prevalence of cancer is estimated to be 97 per 100,000 persons with greater prevalence in urban areas. The evidence suggests that cancer prevalence is highest among the elderly and also among females in the reproductive age groups. Cancer displays a significant socioeconomic gradient even after adjusting for age-sex specifics and clustering in a multilevel regression framework. We find that out-of-pocket expenditure on cancer treatment is among the highest for any ailment.

The average out of pocket spending on inpatient care in private facilities is about three-times that of public facilities. Furthermore, treatment for about 40 percent of cancer hospitalization cases is financed mainly through borrowings, sale of assets and contributions from friends and relatives. Also, over 60 percent of the households who seek care from the private sector incur out of pocket expenditure in excess of 20 percent of their annual per capita household expenditure. Given the catastrophic implications, this study calls for a disease-based approach towards financing such high-cost ailment. It is suggested that universal cancer care insurance should be envisaged and combined with existing accident and life insurance policies for the poorer sections in India. In concluding, we call for policies to improve cancer survivorship through effective prevention and early detection. In particular, greater public health investments in infrastructure, human resources and quality of care deserve priority attention.