

A Milestone in Lung Cancer Screening

The Canadian Cancer Survivor Network, represented by President & CEO Jackie Manthorne, was pleased to be invited to speak at the Lung Health Foundation's virtual day at the Ontario Legislature in a celebration of lung cancer screening being made a permanent program in Ontario on May 27, 2021. This event was also attended by Lung Cancer Canada, lung cancer patients, and many Ontario MPPs and staff.

Opening remarks were made by George Habib, President and CEO of the Lung Health Foundation, followed by Dr. Paul Wheatley-Price, then President of Lung Cancer Canada, who spoke about how to address equity in lung cancer screening, while Manthorne addressed the issue of how to improve access to lung cancer treatments.

Debi Lascelle and Graham Hymas, both lung cancer patient advocates, shared their experiences with being screened and diagnosed at an early stage. Debi testified that "my lung cancer story is short. In 2010, I took part in the Pan-Canadian Early Detection of Lung Cancer Study. Early stage lung cancer was diagnosed, I underwent minimally invasive surgery. No chemo. No radiation. Today, I am cured. Early detection made that possible...Research has proven that screening saves lives, lessens the emotional costs to patients, and lessens the financial burden on the healthcare system."

The importance of earlier diagnosis to improving lung cancer survivorship

In Canada, lung cancer kills more people than colon, breast and prostate cancers combined because it is often detected at a late stage.¹ Seventy percent of all lung cancers are currently diagnosed at an advanced stage and when symptoms are already present.² The five-year survival rate for advanced-stage lung cancer is less than 19 per cent.³ **However, if lung cancer is detected at the earliest stage (Stage 1A), the five-year survival rate is more than 80 per cent.**⁴

Establishing lung cancer screening programs

In 2020, the government of British Columbia announced the first formal life-saving lung cancer screening program in Canada, to be launched in 2022. It is anticipated that approximately 300 people will be diagnosed each year through the program and will be diagnosed earlier – giving

¹ Canadian Cancer Society, Statistics Canada, and Public Health Agency of Canada, "Canadian Cancer Statistics: A 2018 special report on cancer incidence by stage," Canadian Cancer Society, last modified 2018, <https://www.cancer.ca/~media/cancer.ca/CW/cancer%20information/cancer%20101/Canadian%20cancer%20statistics/Canadian-Cancer-Statistics-2018-EN.pdf?la=en>.

² Avai Canadian Cancer Statistics Advisory Committee. Canadian Cancer Statistics 2019. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society; 2019. Available at: [cancer.ca/Canadian-Cancer-Statistics-2019-EN](https://www.cancer.ca/Canadian-Cancer-Statistics-2019-EN)

³ Partnership Against Cancer, "Organized Screening for Lung Cancer Will Save Lives and Resources," Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, last modified October 28, 2020, <https://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/topics/lung-screening-resources/>.

⁴ Ibid.

them more treatment options.⁵ While this is a step in the right direction, organized screening programs need to be adopted across Canada to improve lung cancer survivorship.

Early detection of lung cancer is feasible thanks to advances in technology

Low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) is a quick and non-invasive way to screen for lung cancer. LDCT is the only screening test that has potential to detect lung cancer in earlier stages, to decrease the number of advanced cancers that require expensive treatment, and to improve survival. There is an opportunity to implement CDCT screening effectively in provinces and territories.

Ontario's Lung Cancer Screening Program

In June 2017, Cancer Care Ontario launched a Lung Cancer Screening Pilot for People at High Risk. The main purpose of this pilot was to assess how to best implement organized lung cancer screening for people at high risk across Ontario. The results of the pilot screening were highly favourable and demonstrated that lung cancer screening is feasible and effective in a Canadian context. The Lung Cancer Screening Program was made a permanent program under Cancer Care Ontario/Ontario Health in April 2021.

Healthcare providers are encouraged to refer patients at high risk of getting lung cancer to an Ontario Lung Cancer Screening Program site hospital to determine if they are eligible for screening. Current and former smokers ages 55 to 74 may be referred to the program if they have smoked cigarettes daily for at least 20 years (not necessarily 20 years in a row). People can also contact the Ontario Lung Screening Program site hospital on their own to have their age and smoking history criteria assessed but will still require a referral from a healthcare provider to participate in lung cancer screening through the program.

Ontario Lung Screening Program Sites:

- Ottawa: The Ottawa Hospital and affiliated sites (Renfrew Victoria Hospital, Cornwall Community Hospital)
- Sudbury: Health Sciences North
- Oshawa: Lakeridge Health
- Toronto: University Health Network

The Lung Health Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network and Lung Cancer Canada encouraged MPPs to:

⁵ BC Cancer, "B.C. Launches Lung Cancer Screening Program – the First in Canada," BC Cancer, last modified September 14, 2020, <https://www.bccancer.bc.ca/about/news-stories/news/2020/b-c-launches-lung-cancer-screening-program-%E2%80%93-the-first-in-canada>.

- Work on expanding the number of lung cancer screening program sites to reach more Ontarians and ensure the rollout includes access and health equity as a key success factor.
- Raise awareness for high-risk individuals to be screened for lung cancer.
- Ensure that Ontarians have access to the innovative treatments, including oral cancer medications, needed in order to truly fight this disease.