

Executive Summary



Objectives



The aim of the Integrated Cancer Control Initiative in Latin America (ICCI-LA) study is to help improve Argentina's response to the rising burden of cancer, as part of its Constitutional commitment to health as a human right and as part of the international push for universal health coverage. This report discusses the overall context of the Argentinian health system related to cancer, presents major health system challenges identified by stakeholders, and identifies policy options proposed by the leading experts involved in the ICCI-LA study.

Methods



The primary methods of inquiry used by the research team include a review of published literature and datasets on the Argentinian health system and cancer burden, an online survey conducted among subject-matter experts to ascertain primary challenges and opportunities within the Argentinian health system around cancer, and an in-person stakeholder workshop in Argentina which involved facilitated expert discussions around the topic.

Findings



Using data published by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a part of the WHO, total cancer incidence in Argentina is expected to rise from 129,047 new cases of cancer in 2018 to 190,779 cases in 2040, a 47.8% increase in 20 years. Incidence rates are higher than incidence rates in other large Latin American countries like Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, yet lower than counterparts in Europe and North America. Regarding mortality, the number of deaths from cancer in Argentina is projected to increase by 53.9% from 2018 to 2040, a substantially lower figure than most other Latin American countries. Such projections suggest that Argentina is part of a trend across Latin America of rapidly growing cancer incidence and mortality rates.

Argentina's National Cancer Control Plan (Plan Nacional de Control de Cáncer, PNCC) aims to reduce overall cancer morbidity and mortality; improve cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care quality; and prioritize cancer as a major public health problem. However, improving cancer management in Argentina's complex health system represents a significant challenge. Primary challenges, as identified by 75 expert stakeholders, were organized into four opportunity areas: (1) Organization and Governance, (2) Financing, (3) Resource Management, and (4) Service Delivery. A common challenge identified in both the survey and stakeholder workshop was the high-level of health system fragmentation which leads to inequality in service delivery based on geography and persistent provincial differences in access to care. Other commonly reported issues included a lack of financial organization and planning at a national level, inefficient use of resources, and low-quality services provided to significant portions of the population.

Policy options to address the identified challenges were also organized according to the four opportunity areas. Suggestions related to Organization and Governance included strengthening the single entity that develops cancer policies with a multi-sectoral approach, creating a national cancer plan, developing a framework for a national cancer law, defining problems with care access and quality, and conducting cost-effectiveness analyses to identify priority interventions. Regarding Financing, policy proposals included increasing the national public budget allocated for cancer, creating a centralized and transparent cancer financing mechanism, and redistributing resources in order to lower patient catastrophic health expenditures. Resource Management related proposals included developing accountability and transparency mechanisms for cancer policies and using cost-effectiveness analysis to re-allocate existing resources. Proposals for Service Delivery included closing the gap in access and health outcomes between public and private sectors, investing in primary care, and creating an agency to develop and enforce quality control standards for cancer services.

Recommendations

We propose nine overarching recommendations for the Argentinian health system to address the rising burden of cancer.

Highest priority:

1. Develop and enact a National Comprehensive Cancer Law.
2. Strengthen the entity responsible for developing cancer policies, conducting evaluations, and implementing the national cancer plan.
3. Conduct transparent cost-effectiveness analysis to better delineate cancer policy goals and allocated resources for cancer services.

High priority:

4. Develop standardized care plans, holistic care protocols, and mandatory guidelines for each province that are aligned with national cancer law.
5. Centralize procurement, purchase, and price negotiation of medicines and health technologies.
6. Expand access to cancer care services in the public sector.

Medium priority:

7. Establish and enforce national quality control standards and develop indicators to measure effectiveness, efficiency, equity and responsiveness of cancer services.
8. Improve cancer prevention, primary care, and health education.
9. Strengthen health research and scientific activities in the country.



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