



Join us on 4 February



For immediate distribution

Adaptations and innovations in cancer care through COVID-19 and beyond

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Marking World Cancer Day on 4th February, the Union for International Cancer Control ([UICC](#)) gives voice and says thank you to the nurses, doctors, researchers, volunteers, advocates and other caregivers in oncology from around the world, as well as government agencies, who have worked these past 12 months through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Cancer Day theme "[I Am and I Will](#)" encapsulates their extraordinary spirit and the strength of the cancer community. **Their stories captured throughout the past year are being showcased on the occasion of World Cancer Day in testimonies and articles on a dedicated page of the official website.** These stories highlight that while the pandemic is threatening the progress being made in the fight against cancer, it has also created the opportunity to address systemic weaknesses in many national health systems.

A survey conducted by UICC with over 100 of its member organisations in 55 countries, including civil society, hospitals, research centres and patient support groups, revealed that their **income and organisational activities are under significant pressure**, with almost three-quarters reporting reductions in income of anywhere from 25% to 100% in 2020 and similar projections for 2021. [An analysis of the survey results](#) was published last month in *The Lancet Oncology*.

The testimonies from UICC members further confirm **the difficulties for cancer organisations in maintaining life-saving services**, not only due to a drop in resources but also because of the necessary measures enacted to contain the spread of the coronavirus and fears of contagion on the part of patients. Reports highlight exacerbated shortages in frontline staff, sometimes redirected to the COVID-19 response; interruptions and delays in prevention programmes, diagnostics and testing, clinical trials and research; difficulties in engaging in community outreach with restrictions on travel and social gathering; and greater barriers to accessing essential medicines in low- and middle-income countries.

Prof. Anil D'Cruz, President of UICC and Director of Oncology at Apollo Hospitals in India, said: "It appears quite certain that disruptions to cancer services in the past year will lead to diagnosis at later stages, which in turn will translate into higher cancer-related mortality. Worse still, the wider economic impact of the pandemic on cancer care in all probability will be felt for many years to come, even in high-income countries – in low- and middle-income countries, the impact is unfathomable. However, it is heartening to see the incredible response of the cancer community to mitigate these consequences both in India and elsewhere. Their stories are inspiring and these organisations need all the support we can provide to keep doing their incredible work."

The testimonies that UICC is showcasing illustrate **how organisations and healthcare workers are rallying across the globe** to support patients, resume screenings and diagnostics, maintain awareness on the need for prevention and provide a safe environment



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for treatment. Volunteers have mobilised to deliver medication and even food to patients in need, or ensure transportation to care centres. The private sector is developing innovative technologies to reduce the time spent in care settings while maintaining quality of treatment. Digital technology is allowing doctors and research centres to collaborate and share knowledge at a global level, and accelerating the move towards greater patient-centred care.

Dr Miriam Mutebi, Consultant and Breast Cancer Surgical Oncologist at Aga Khan University Hospital in Kenya and Member of the UICC Board of Directors, said: “There has been notable progress in cancer care in recent years. In high-income countries, we have seen drops in incidence and mortality rates for certain cancers. In low- and middle-income regions such as Africa, we are seeing a promising increase in awareness about cancer as well as moves towards the implementation of national cancer control plans. **Now is not the time to lose ground** but, moving forwards, we must not only take advantage of the adaptations and innovations that are emerging as a “silver lining” to COVID-19, **we must also take the opportunity to improve health systems as the pandemic passes.**”

Considerable challenges remain in the fight against cancer. The widespread impact of the pandemic will make it harder for countries to achieve certain sustainable development goals, in particular health targets and universal health coverage. It may also slow the implementation of WHO’s ambitious but realistic [global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer](#) within a few generations. At the same time, the adoption of this strategy by the international community at the height of the pandemic proves the ability of governments and organisations to come together and breathe life into the promise that future generations of women will not die from a preventable disease.

Dr Cary Adams, CEO of UICC said: “COVID-19 has impacted cancer control globally and the response by the cancer community has been extraordinary, heroic even. This year, more than ever, it is appropriate that we celebrate their achievements on World Cancer Day. Let us all aim in 2021 to refocus our collective efforts on the long-term challenges that cancer poses to every country in the world. We must prevent more, diagnose earlier and ensure that all people living with cancer have access to the quality treatment they need.”

World Cancer Day 2021 is dedicated to the courage and achievements of people living with cancer and their families, as well as the nurses, doctors, researchers, volunteers, advocates and others who care for them and work on their behalf – and calls for everyone in helping to save lives from this disease.

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[\[summary version\]](#)

On World Cancer Day, UICC shines a light on the heroic responses to the pandemic by cancer organisations and individuals around the world struggling to maintain progress in cancer care.

A survey conducted by UICC with over 100 of its member organisations in 55 countries revealed that their income and organisational activities are under significant pressure.



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UICC member and partner testimonies, and other articles gathered by UICC [on a dedicated page of the official website](#), illustrate how organisations and healthcare workers are rallying across the globe to support patients, resume screenings and diagnostics, maintain awareness on the need for prevention and provide a safe environment for treatment. “Their stories are inspiring and these organisations need all the support we can provide to keep doing their incredible work,” says Prof. Anil D’Cruz, President of UICC and Director of Oncology at Apollo Hospitals in India.

Progress is being made in the fight against cancer, with higher survival rates for certain cancers, a greater awareness about the disease and a wider implementation of national cancer control plans. While the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening this progress, it has also created the opportunity to address systemic weaknesses in many national health systems.

Dr Cary Adams, CEO of UICC, says: “Let us all aim in 2021 to refocus our collective efforts on the long-term challenges that cancer poses to every country in the world. We must prevent more, diagnose earlier and ensure that all people living with cancer have access to the quality treatment they need.”

CONTACT

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About the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)

The Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) is the largest and oldest international cancer-fighting organisation. Founded in Geneva in 1933, UICC has over 1,200 member organisations in 172 countries. It enjoys consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and has official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UICC has over 50 partners, including associations, companies and foundations committed to the fight against cancer. UICC is a founding member of the NCD Alliance, the McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer and the International Cancer Control Partnership (ICCP) and established the City Cancer Challenge Foundation in January 2019.

UICC’s mission is to both unite and support the cancer community in its efforts to reduce the global cancer burden, promote greater equity and ensure that cancer control remains a priority on the global health and development agenda. It pursues these goals by bringing together global leaders through innovative and far-reaching cancer-control events and initiatives, building capacities to meet regional needs and developing awareness campaigns.

www.uicc.org



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About World Cancer Day

World Cancer Day takes place every year on 4th February and is the uniting global initiative under which the world comes together to raise the profile of cancer in a positive and inspiring way. Spearheaded by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), the day aims to save millions of preventable deaths each year by raising awareness and improving education about the disease while calling for action from governments and individuals across the world.

World Cancer Day 2021 is led by the theme “[I Am and I Will](#)”, an empowering call for personal commitment that represents the power of our actions taken now to reduce the growing impact of cancer.

This year follows on from the success of last year’s campaign, which saw nearly 1,000 activities taking place in 113 countries, including 85 monuments in 52 cities lit in the colours of World Cancer Day, some 15,000 press articles published in 150 countries, over 720,000 social media mentions, more than 500,000 visitors to the website downloading over 120,000 materials, and 65 governments participating in 2020.

For more information, please visit: www.worldcancerday.org

About World Cancer Day activities and grassroots events

Local and international associations and communities around the world come together to hold events dedicated to raising awareness and education about cancer. This year, in light of the pandemic, the cancer community is showing considerable resilience and creativity. Many new activities will be taking place in virtual or hybrid format to replace in-person events that may no longer be allowed to take place, such as free cancer screenings, fundraisers, awareness walks and runs, and public seminars.

For more information about specific events, please visit: www.worldcancerday.org/map