

## A New Cancer Strategy for Scotland

### Executive summary of Cancer Research UK's consultation response, June 2022

A new cancer strategy has the potential to be a major milestone for people affected by cancer in Scotland, signalling a renewed drive and setting an ambitious roadmap towards better cancer outcomes. As cancer care becomes increasingly complex and incidence rises along with the ageing population, Scotland must be ready to adapt to a shifting environment and continue to deliver innovative approaches to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, driven by lifesaving cancer research, to reduce cancer incidence and transform outcomes for people affected by cancer in the long-term.

The proposed approach offers the opportunity to balance recovering from the impact of the pandemic in the short-term whilst creating opportunities to transform cancer services in a better, more innovative, and efficient way over the next ten years. The strategy's vision must build momentum and support across cancer services and the wider community to ensure Scotland can lead the way in driving transformation. To support this, the strategy's vision should be ambitious and holistic – we propose the following: “A world class cancer service that delivers high-quality care and support for everyone at risk of, or affected by, cancer, and a thriving cancer research sector, leading to improved cancer outcomes for the people of Scotland.”

**Reducing cancer incidence and transforming cancer outcomes requires action across the pathway. To unlock the opportunities set out in our response, there are three fundamental enablers of success which must be prioritised.**

- **Sufficient and sustainable funding must be secured for the strategy's 10-year lifespan**  
A ten-year strategy with funding in place will help ensure it delivers the meaningful improvements people affected by cancer deserve, as well as gain the confidence of the cancer community and wider public. As the Scottish Government has demonstrated for previous cancer strategies, additional investment will be needed to improve patient outcomes and unlock the benefits of innovative approaches and increased efficiency.
- **The cancer workforce must expand to meet patient need now and in the future**  
Scotland has chronic shortages in the workforce specialities key to diagnosing and treating cancer. These shortages have hampered progress to reduce waiting times and improve cancer outcomes for years – challenges only heightened by COVID-19. Service capacity must expand, with modelling and long-term funding plans put in place to deliver a sustained expansion of the cancer workforce to meet patient need and deliver on the ambitions of the strategy.
- **Data collection, collation, and analysis must be transformed in Scotland**  
Data gives us powerful insights that are critical to enabling us to prevent more cancers, detect more cancers earlier, and develop more effective treatments. Scottish Government should prioritise improving the collection and reporting of key datasets, as well as the underlying infrastructure, to unlock better intelligence and data-driven action in the years to come.

In developing our response, we have drawn on our expertise from engaging with, and supporting the development of, other cancer strategies across the UK. Our response is informed by extensive intelligence, research, and insight, as well as by international best practice. We have also consulted with people affected by cancer in Scotland to ensure their experiences and views are reflected in our consultation response.

CRUK would be pleased to discuss any of the issues raised in our response further. We look forward to continued engagement with this incredibly important initiative throughout the development and implementation of the strategy.

## Summary of CRUK's response and recommendations

### Approach

- **The strategy's vision must build momentum and support across cancer services and the wider community to ensure Scotland can lead the way in driving transformation. To support this, the vision should be ambitious and holistic – we propose the following: “A world class cancer service that delivers high-quality care and support for everyone at risk of, or affected by, cancer, and a thriving cancer research sector, leading to improved cancer outcomes for the people of Scotland.”**
- The cancer strategy must cover cancer prevention, the entire cancer pathway, and research, in order to deliver the holistic approach required to reduce the burden of cancer and transform cancer outcomes. In the short-term, priority areas for funding and action must include improving data collection, expanding diagnostic capacity, and tackling inequalities.
- Scottish Government must ensure that the strategy is supported by a clear accountability and measurement framework, with progress against the full ten-year strategy independently assessed and published annually.

### Prevention

- We encourage the Scottish Government to aim to be a world leader in introducing policies that tackle the biggest preventable causes of cancer – smoking and overweight and obesity – which are also major drivers of health inequalities. This should include setting a target of 5% or less smoking prevalence in Scotland for all socio-economic groups, including the most deprived quintile.
- The strategy should explore bold new measures to limit uptake of smoking – including conditional registration, maximum unit pricing, pack inserts, dissuasive cigarettes, and raising the age of sale to 21. It must also help people to stop smoking through increasing smoking cessation support across healthcare settings.
- CRUK is strongly supportive of the Scottish Government in tackling obesity. We support current and proposed restrictions on the promotion and advertising of products high in fat, salt or sugar and urge that these commitments are delivered on.

### Early and timely diagnosis

- Too many cancers in Scotland are diagnosed at too late a stage, when treatments are less likely to be effective. An Earlier Diagnosis Vision should achieve the comprehensive action required to transform early diagnosis of cancer in Scotland. **We propose the following Early Diagnosis Vision: By 2032 Scotland will lead the world in cancer early diagnosis, with at least 80% of all cancer patients diagnosed at Stage I and II.**
- This vision will be achieved through harnessing the power of early detection and diagnosis research and innovation, achieving the full potential of optimised screening programmes and diagnostic pathways, ensuring everyone seeks help when they need it, and guaranteeing diagnostic services have the capacity to see every patient promptly through investing in the cancer workforce and key equipment.
- Timely diagnosis is critical to patient experience and driving the earlier diagnosis of cancer. Transforming the diagnostic pathway requires accelerated action across a range of areas, including screening, early detection, Early Cancer Diagnostic Centres, and primary care, as well as effective pathway monitoring.

### Treatment

- Demand for surgery is expected to increase over the next ten years as cancer incidence increases and efforts to improve early diagnosis hopefully result in a shift in stage at diagnosis. Surgical capacity must keep pace through ongoing reviews of capacity, patient need, and workforce requirements, as well as identifying where the delivery and organisation of cancer surgery services can be optimised.

- CRUK welcomed the Scottish Government's ambition in *Recovery and Redesign: An Action Plan for Cancer Services* (2020) to work with the radiotherapy community to develop a national plan for the radiotherapy service. The cancer strategy should therefore outline how the actions in this plan will be taken forward as well as setting longer-term plans for radiotherapy services, including planning for the evaluation and implementation of new technologies.
- Flexible pricing mechanisms such as outcome-based payment (OBP) can speed up access to some licensed medicines with immature trial data as well as help to address rising cancer medicine prices. Over the next three to five years, appropriate pilot studies should be implemented to determine opportunities and barriers to OBP.

### Service delivery

- The strategy must address the chronic shortages in the workforce specialities key to diagnosing and treating cancer. This will require modelling trends in the health workforce to support planning, long-term funding, comprehensive plans to maximise staff wellbeing and skills, and targeted measures to tackle regional variation in the cancer workforce.
- Sufficient and sustainable capital investment is required to maintain and expand health infrastructure across Scotland. A priority area for funding must be replacing and expanding key diagnostic equipment to support the roll out of innovations in the diagnostic pathway.
- A 'Once for Scotland' approach will be invaluable to ensuring Health Boards work collaboratively to deliver high quality care for those affected by cancer across the country. Commitments to collaborating at a national level in areas where a unified approach will bring significant benefits, such as IT systems and cancer recognition and referral, should be prioritised.

### Data

- Data and data-driven technologies underpin every effort we make to understand cancer, prioritise resources and identify disparities. It is vital that fundamental issues across the data lifecycle are addressed to ensure it meets its potential in Scotland, with any actions on data collection, safeguarding and use involving meaningful patient and public engagement and involvement.
- In its first 3 years, the strategy must prioritise providing timely, high-quality, transparent, and integrated data to enable a better understanding of the cancer landscape in Scotland and particularly where variation exists.
- Any future strategy for cancer should seek to align with and support the delivery of the transformative plans captured in the Scottish Cancer Intelligence Framework (SCIF), which is being delivered primarily via Public Health Scotland.

### Research

- Scotland has a strong research base for its size, significantly overperforming in competitive research funding per capita.<sup>1,2</sup> But Scotland has the potential to go further and drive real improvements in the clinical research environment that may not be possible in other parts of the UK through ensuring there is a collaborative and competitive research environment in Scotland.
- As part of the cancer strategy, the Scottish Government should commit to producing a national cancer research strategy that closely aligns with the remobilisation of national cancer services to support recovery from the impact of COVID-19. But the strategy must go further than recovering research and also significantly expand clinical research capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> Cancer Research UK. 2019. [Bench to Bedside: Optimising the Medical Research Environment in Scotland through Collaboration](#). Accessed May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Technopolis Group. 2017. [The role of EU funding in UK research and innovation](#). Accessed May 2022.

- It is essential that patient participation in clinical research is significantly improved. Steps to achieve this should cover increasing the number of conversations with patients about clinical research and reviewing the regional distribution of research to help address accessibility and inclusivity challenges.

### Inequalities

- There are inequalities across the cancer pathway through prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care, contributing to stark and unacceptable differences in cancer incidence and outcomes. Targeted action is essential to reducing these inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind as Scotland drives progress across cancer services.
- Tackling cancer inequalities requires significantly improving data collection to further identify the key cancer inequalities and their drivers, as well as targeted action now based on best practice to reduce known disparities.
- People affected by cancer living in rural or island communities risk facing greater barriers to accessing diagnostic and treatment services. It is essential that these barriers are addressed, working closely with patients in these regions to understand their needs, whilst ensuring high-quality service delivery is not compromised.

### About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the world's largest independent cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. Our long-term investment in state-of-the-art facilities has helped to create a thriving network of research at 90 laboratories and institutions in more than 40 towns and cities across the UK supporting the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In 2020/21, we invested over £30 million in research in Scotland.

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