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## Editorial

# Cancer Australia's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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When the COVID-19 pandemic began early in 2020, it was clear that it would impact healthcare around the world – but the exact size and scope of that impact for Australia was unknown. Furthermore, the impact on cancer care and considerations for optimal cancer treatment during a pandemic were not initially defined and clinical care decisions had to be made quickly, using the best available information from around the world.

Cancer Australia was established in 2006 to benefit all Australians affected by cancer, and their families and carers. Cancer Australia aims to reduce the impact of cancer, address disparities and improve outcomes for people affected by cancer by leading and coordinating national, evidence-based interventions across the continuum of care. As part of its national leadership role, Cancer Australia has undertaken a range of initiatives to collate, summarise and publish information to inform and support optimal cancer care during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of Cancer Australia's initiatives is an 'information hub' [1]. The information hub provides advice and information through a repository of up-to-date, evidence-based Australian and international resources and guidance for people affected by cancer, health professionals and researchers.

## Information for Health Professionals

Cancer Australia's information hub presents guidance grouped by country of origin and categorised by topic areas in alignment with the continuum of care – diagnosis, treatment, surgery, medical oncology, radiation oncology, primary care, telehealth, clinical trials, follow-up care, and supportive and palliative care. The structure is intended to facilitate easy access to information by health professionals. As at 5 June 2020, Cancer Australia's COVID-19 repository links to 122 guidance documents from Australia and New Zealand,

Canada, Europe, Middle East, UK and USA. Most guidance is in the areas of radiation oncology (29 documents), general treatment (27 documents) and medical oncology (23 documents).

## Information for Researchers

Another section of the information hub is a collection of articles ranging from editorials, evidence-based and experience-based narratives, to evidence-informed and experience-informed recommendations for cancer care. There is also a smaller body of literature included that provides data in relation to COVID-19 infection among cancer patients and outcomes for cancer patients with COVID-19. Research articles in Cancer Australia's repository have been placed under website tabs labelled 'data', 'recommendations' and 'shared experience'. The categorisation of the research articles according to these three headings or tabs is intended to assist the reader navigate the multitude of articles. Since early March, the number of research articles has risen steeply, as shown in [Figure 1](#). As at 5 June 2020, Cancer Australia's COVID-19 repository links to 325 research articles, comprising 67 'data' articles, 69 'recommendations' articles and 189 'shared experience' articles. Research articles are continually added to the repository as they become available.

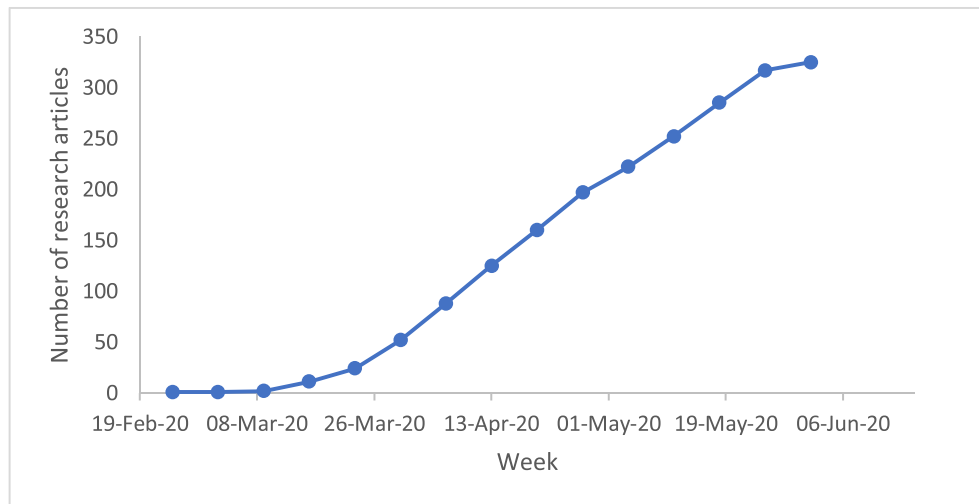
## Information for the Community

The information hub also contains a dedicated cancer and COVID-19 webpage providing information, relevant Cancer Australia resources and links to external resources, for the community. Key information is provided in several languages and includes information and advice about mental wellbeing for cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic and tailored messaging for children and young people with cancer. Specific messaging has been developed

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**Fig 1.** Cumulative number of research articles published in Cancer Australia's repository.

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a dedicated section 'What it means for our Mob'.

## International Initiatives

The Cancer Australia information hub has some similarities to other international initiatives, including the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) [2], American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) [3] and European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) [4] guidance repositories, as the international cancer control community responded swiftly to the pandemic to provide information in a timely and easily accessible format. Cancer Australia's information hub was developed for a range of multidisciplinary health professionals, researchers and the Australian community, including tailored information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Cancer Australia's repository collates both national and international guidance, categorising it according to the steps of the cancer care continuum from diagnosis through to palliative care, across all cancer types, rather than according to individual tumour stream. As a result, Cancer Australia's repository provides the latest guidance and research available from across the world in one easily accessible area for a range of audiences.

## Other Cancer Australia Initiatives

In response to heightened concern about COVID-19 and cancer care in the community, Cancer Australia was involved in, and is promoting, a video message developed collaboratively across several agencies and involving various public health and cancer care professionals in Australia to inform people with cancer and their carers about how COVID-19 might impact their cancer journey [1].

As the pandemic continued, and in response to increasing awareness that many people were avoiding or

delaying seeing their general practitioners with symptoms, Cancer Australia launched the 'Cancer Won't Wait' social media campaign to encourage people to see their doctor about 'red flag symptoms' that may be due to cancer [1].

Cancer Australia has also developed a conceptual framework that provides an overview of cancer management under different phases of the pandemic and in relation to health system capacity [5]. The guidance is mapped according to the cancer care pathway and includes overarching best practice principles of care as contained in the Optimal Care Pathways for people with cancer [6]. Although the framework has been clearly designed with the Australian healthcare system and this COVID-19 pandemic in mind, the principles are expected to be transferrable to any jurisdiction and for any pandemic.

The range of COVID-19 communication and resources developed by Cancer Australia will inform and support evolving cancer care in the current and any future pandemics. Existing information is largely in relation to acute phases of the pandemic and emerging evidence is informing care during the early recovery phases. Reflections and learnings will inform opportunities for sustained changes in cancer care outside of pandemic conditions.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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