



## MYTH 04

### I DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO CANCER CARE

**Truth:** All people have the right to access proven and effective cancer treatments and services on equal terms, and without suffering hardship as a consequence.

#### ACCESS TO CANCER CARE IS A MATTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

##### Disparities in cancer outcomes exist between the developed and developing world for most cancers

###### Evidence

- Patients in low resource settings whose cancer may be curable in the developed world, often suffer and die unnecessarily due to a lack of awareness, resources and access to affordable and quality cancer services.
- Gender inequities in power, resources, culture and inadequate investment at a primary healthcare level restrict women in low resource settings from accessing essential cancer services, e.g. cancer prevention and early detection programmes.
- Over 85% of the 275,000 women who die every year from cervical cancer are from developing countries.
- More than 70% of the 160,000 newly diagnosed cases of childhood cancer worldwide each year lack access to effective treatment. The result is an unacceptably low survival rate of ~10% in some low- and middle-income countries compared to ~90% in some high-income countries.
- Poor and vulnerable populations are unable to afford expensive cancer medicines and treatments, which must often be paid by patients out-of-pocket, pushing families further into poverty.



#### Global Advocacy Message

Cancer is not just a health matter. It has wide-reaching social, economic and human rights implications, and is a significant barrier to achieving inclusive and equitable development. Inequality is deepening – social and environmental factors and the double disease burden of exposures in many low- and middle-income countries are keeping the 'bottom billion' locked in chronic poverty and threatening national economies.

**ACCESS TO  
EFFECTIVE, QUALITY  
AND AFFORDABLE  
CANCER SERVICES  
IS THE RIGHT OF  
ALL INDIVIDUALS**

**All people should have access, without discrimination, to needed health services, and safe, affordable, and effective medicines and technologies.**

**Evidence**

- In many cases the largest and most unacceptable gap in cancer care is the lack of adequate palliative care and access to pain relief.
- A short list of medications can control pain for almost 90% of all people with cancer pain including children, yet little to no access to adequate pain treatment is the norm in many countries.
- Inequities in access to cancer services are closely associated with socioeconomic status with poor and vulnerable populations unable to afford expensive cancer medicines, as well as experiencing other obstacles to access such as distance to quality treatment facilities.
- Differences in occupation, gender, ethnicity and in particular education, are also linked with common cancer risk factors e.g. poor nutrition, tobacco use and second-hand smoke, and harmful use of alcohol, regardless of the resource setting.
- In many countries, irrelevant of their resource setting, lack of health insurance and other barriers prevent people from getting access to even basic healthcare.
- Universal health coverage to ensure that all people have access to health services without financial hardship is a critical component of sustainable development and poverty reduction, and a key element of any effort to reduce social inequities in cancer outcomes.

**According to the World Health Organization (WHO), universal coverage is the hallmark of a government's commitment to improve the wellbeing of all its citizens.**



**Global Advocacy Message**

Cost-effective interventions must be made available in an equitable manner through access to information and education about cancer at the primary health care level, as well as early detection programmes and affordable, quality medicines, vaccines and technologies, delivered as part of national cancer control plans.

Social protection measures, including universal health coverage, are essential to ensure that all individuals and families have full access to healthcare and opportunities to prevent and control cancer.

**“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being”**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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