

Why we are Worried: The Facts

Cancer

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada (Canadian Cancer Society, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2010). It is estimated that in 2011 alone, 177,800 new cases of cancer were diagnosed (excluding about 74,100 non-melanoma skin cancers) and that cancer took the lives of 75,000 Canadians (Canadian Cancer Society, 2012). Based on 2011 estimates, 40 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men in Canada will develop cancer during their lifetime (Canadian Cancer Society, 2012). The risk “increases with age — 42 per cent of new cancer cases and 59 per cent of cancer deaths will occur among those who are 70 years of age and older” (Canadian Cancer Society, 2012).

While there are a variety of causes at play in the case of cancer, lifestyle has a role in mitigating risk.

Did you know...

- Smoking is estimated to be responsible for 30 per cent of all cancer deaths and to be related to more than 85 per cent of lung cancer cases in Canada (Canadian Cancer Society, 2011b). “In the short term, smoking cessation among adults would have the greatest impact on reducing respiratory diseases such as lung cancer and COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease]” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007, p. vii).
- “People who are overweight or obese are at greater risk for cancer of the breast, colon and rectum, esophagus, kidney, pancreas and uterus” (Canadian Cancer Society, 2011a).
- The capacity to make healthy lifestyle choices is embedded within broader social and economic factors that can predict illness and health (Raphael, 2002, p. 2). For example:
 - Tobacco consumption is connected to socio-economic level: consumption increases as the standard of living goes down (WHO, 2004). Indeed, “social deprivation — whether measured by poor housing, low income, lone parenthood, unemployment or homelessness — is associated with high rates of smoking and very low rates of quitting” (WHO, 2003, p. 24).
 - Poor people have a greater likelihood of dying prematurely from cancer than those from wealthier backgrounds (Booth, Zhang-Salomons, & Mackillop, p. 4162).

Fiscal implications:

- In 2004, Mirolla estimated the costs to the Canadian economy of premature death due to cancer alone to be \$11.6 billion each year (p. iii), so that figure likely is higher now.

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