

FACT SHEET

More radiotherapy services across NSW

Our state Government has the power to reduce the impact of cancer on our lives and Cancer Council NSW asks “why wouldn’t you?”

Each year, thousands of people miss out on radiotherapy treatment because of service gaps.

The NSW Government can fix this by funding new services in priority areas.

“The health system is not set up for people living in places like Boggabri, all the specialist services are too far away and there is extensive travel involved ... [and] extensive coordination to minimise additional trips or spending all day waiting for various appointments.” Rex

The problem...

Radiotherapy is an important and cost-effective arm of cancer treatment. However, access to radiotherapy treatment is currently limited in certain areas of NSW. Health authorities around the world accept that radiotherapy is needed for at least 50% of cancer patients.ⁱ Unfortunately, only 36% of cancer patients received radiotherapy (between 1996 to 2006).ⁱⁱ As a result, almost 51,000 cancer patients did not receive radiotherapy and nearly 40,000 years of additional life were lost.ⁱⁱⁱ

In some areas of NSW, 80% of patients requiring radiotherapy live more than 120 kilometres from the nearest facility, which means:

- travelling long distances for treatment
- staying away from home for long periods
- paying the additional costs of treatment as a private patient or receive suboptimal treatment.^{iv,v}

The financial, physical and emotional burdens reported by patients living in regional and rural areas of NSW highlight the need for urgent, substantial and sustained improvements to radiotherapy services in the state.^{v,vi}

A third of patients who need radiotherapy miss out.

“My husband was diagnosed [with cancer] and died very soon after. We had to travel 600km to radiotherapy treatment and sadly this took most of his remaining time ... if the centre was closer we could have returned home [to] our family.”
Fiona

The solution...

Government planning and investing in expanded radiotherapy services can fix this problem. Conservative estimates of future radiotherapy demand (based on expected new cancer cases and annual capacity per machine per year) show that NSW will need 69 radiotherapy machines by 2012 and 81 by 2017.^{iv}

The NSW Government also has the power to establish cooperative arrangements with private radiotherapy providers to provide affordable treatment for patients living in areas with only private services. This would also relieve pressure and alleviate waiting times at public radiotherapy centres.

The Audit Office of NSW has also noted that NSW Health should identify a range of funding sources for radiotherapy services, and has recommended the development of a funding strategy that takes into account the role of the Commonwealth and the private sector.^{vii}

WHAT DOES THE NSW GOVERNMENT NEED TO DO?

The NSW Government can ensure optimal and equitable access to radiotherapy services is provided for cancer patients across NSW by:

- funding new radiotherapy centres and machines with priority focus on areas at a distance from existing services
- purchasing services from private radiotherapy centres so that patients are not required to pay a ‘gap fee’.

If the recommended investment in radiotherapy infrastructure is made, NSW would have the chance to overcome the current gap in radiotherapy service provision and ensure that patients requiring radiotherapy in NSW have access to affordable, timely treatment, regardless of where they live.

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ⁱ National Radiotherapy Advisory Group. Radiotherapy: developing a world class service for England. Report to Ministers from National Radiotherapy Advisory Group. London: NRAG; 2007.

ⁱⁱ NSW Health. Strategic plan for radiotherapy services in New South Wales 1995–2000. Sydney: NSW Department of Health; 1995.

ⁱⁱⁱ NSW Health. Planning for radiotherapy services in NSW to 2006. Sydney: NSW Department of Health; 2003.

^{iv} Cancer Council NSW. Roadblocks to Radiotherapy – stories behind the statistics. Sydney: Cancer Council NSW; 2009.

^v Delaney G, Jacob S, et al. The role of radiotherapy in cancer treatment: estimating optimal utilization from a review of evidence-based clinical guidelines. *Cancer* 2005;104:1129-37.

^{vi} NSW Health. 2007 Radiotherapy management information system report. Sydney: NSW Health Department; 2008.

^{vii} Cancer Council NSW. Improving radiotherapy – Where to from here? A roadmap for the NSW Government. Sydney: Cancer Council NSW; 2009.

^{viii} Cancer Council NSW. Roadblocks to Radiotherapy – stories behind the statistics. Sydney: Cancer Council NSW; 2009.

^{ix} Zucca A, Boyes A, Girgis A, Hall A. Travel all over the countryside: Travelling for cancer treatment in NSW and Victoria (conference presentation). Gold Coast: Clinical Oncological Society of Australia Conference; 2010.

^x Cancer Council NSW. Improving radiotherapy – Where to from here? A roadmap for the NSW Government. Sydney: Cancer Council NSW; 2009.

^{xi} Audit Office of NSW. Tackling cancer with radiotherapy: NSW Department of Health. Sydney: Audit Office of NSW; 2009.