



WORLD CANCER DAY 2026

#UnitedByUnique

THEME: "UNITED BY UNIQUE"

The Cancer Association of Zimbabwe joins the international community and the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) in commemorating World Cancer Day on the **4th of February** 2026. This year's World Cancer Day (WCD) commemoration theme is "**UNITED BY UNIQUE**". This theme emphasizes the importance of personalized care and treatments to cater for individual's unique needs. The uniqueness in how individuals experience cancer calls for an adaptive and individualized approach to cancer treatment and care. The theme calls upon everyone to act accordingly in the prevention and control of cancer by focusing on reducing various inequalities in cancer care and promoting person centered care. The theme reminds us of the need to work together to promote "Health Equity" in cancer care. In Zimbabwe, substantial gaps persist throughout the cancer care continuum, from initial diagnosis through survivorship. Access to cancer information and appropriate management services remained limited. The "**UNITED BY UNIQUE**" theme urges individuals, corporations, civil society, and government to unite in reducing the global cancer burden through improved, comprehensive cancer care for all. It stresses the need to tailor make cancer interventions to address the unique needs of individuals. This call for personalized cancer interventions aligns perfectly with Zimbabwe's national drive toward achieving universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030

CANCER AWARENESS AND CANCER LITERACY LEVELS: Significant gaps in cancer knowledge persist across Zimbabwe, perpetuated by widespread myths and misconceptions and lack of comprehensive national cancer awareness program. The Zimbabwe National Cancer Registry (ZNCR) reports that over 80% of cancer cases in 2019 were diagnosed at advanced stages when treatment options are limited and less effective. Since at least one-third of all cancers are preventable, championing healthy lifestyle choices is essential. Increase in cancer awareness can empower people to recognize early warning signs, make informed choices about their health and counter their own fears and misconceptions about cancer. Healthy lifestyle is helpful in reducing the risks of developing cancers:

- ❖ Tobacco and alcohol use account for 27% of the cancer deaths. Reducing the rates of tobacco and alcohol use including drug and substance abuse will significantly decrease the global cancer burden.
- ❖ Alcohol use has been linked to cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, bowel, liver and breast.
- ❖ Overweight and obesity are strongly linked with an increased risk of bowel, breast, uterine, ovarian, pancreatic, esophagus, kidney, and gallbladder cancer later in life.

Cancer awareness helps in enabling healthy choices to reduce the risks associated with cancer.

EARLY DETECTION, TREATMENT AND PALLIATIVE CARE SERVICES: Over the years, Zimbabwe has improved accessibility to screening of common cancer particularly cervical cancer. However, there are still pronounced gaps in the provision of screening for other common cancers such as prostate, breast and colon cancers. The prohibitive user fees, unavailability, centralization of cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment services reduce accessibility to these vital lifesaving cancer services.

- ❖ Life-saving cancer diagnosis and treatment should be equal for all – no matter who you are, your level of education, level of income or where you live in the world.
- ❖ The availability, affordability and accessibility of cancer services need to be improved. Early detection, diagnosis, treatment and palliative care services should be accessible to every citizen. This is important in protecting individuals and families from financial hardship emanating from out-of-pocket medical expenditures.

AVAILABILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ESSENTIAL CANCER MEDICINES: Most of the common cancers in Zimbabwe can be treated, however, the cost of medication is unbearable to patients. Cancer medicines are mostly available in private pharmacies where prices are pegged in foreign currency. Very few patients are covered through private health insurance which partially covers the medication expenses. Most patients pay for their medication through out-of-pocket expenditures resulting in failure to even commence or to complete the prescribed treatment regimes.



- ❖ Essential cancer medicines (WHO model list) should be availed through the public health pharmaceutical route and to be accessed in pharmacies at public health institutions across the country.
- ❖ Social protection such as Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTOS), medical travel warrants and food vouchers for vulnerable cancer patients such as patients without medical insurance, persons with disabilities, children and the elderly seeking cancer treatment, to be revived and sustained. Speeding up the national health insurance processes will improve access to cancer services.

FUNDING AND RESOURCE MOBLISATION FOR CANCER: Cancer control is both capital and technologically intensive hence the need for sustainable local and international fundraising initiatives. It makes a lot of economic sense for a nation to invest in cancer prevention and control than dealing with the consequences. Failure to invest in cancer prevention means that the nation will not be able to cope with the increase in the cancer cases and this will retard development due to increased health spending. Cancer burden, if not controlled is likely to retard Zimbabwe's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Government investment in cancer prevention and control will lead to increased productivity and improved quality of life. Introduction of sin and sugar taxes by the government of Zimbabwe is a step in the right direction bearing in mind the current dwindling of external health funding. Ringfencing these funds for health is important in ensuring universal access to cancer services in Zimbabwe.

COORDINATION OF NATIONAL CANCER PROGRAMMES: Cancer control requires substantial capital investment and advanced technology. From an economic perspective, investing in cancer prevention and control is far more cost-effective than managing the consequences of disease. The government's introduction of sin and sugar taxes represents a positive step forward. Ringfencing these dedicated funds specifically for health services is crucial for ensuring universal access to cancer care. Zimbabwe's growing cancer burden demands a robust national coordination mechanism to oversee cancer interventions and capitalize on emerging global innovations. Extensive stakeholder consultations are essential for establishing an effective national cancer coordination structure that ensures cancer-related levies and taxes are utilized transparently and accountably.

The "**UNITED BY UNIQUE**" theme calls for unified efforts to address specific gaps and disparities in cancer care worldwide, promoting health equity for all. Our unique cancer stories and experiences should inform and guide us toward our shared vision of universal cancer care. **#UniqueInOurStoriesUnitedInOurVision**

We urge the government and its partners, members of the public, and all stakeholders to intensify efforts toward cancer prevention and control while improving the quality of life for those diagnosed with cancer



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OUR VISION: Universal access to cancer information and comprehensive cancer management services

"We are committed to cancer prevention and improving the quality of life of patients, their families and communities through timeous, cost effective and evidence-based interventions" – Together We Can!