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Recovery under pressure: persistent strain on cancer patient organisations five years after COVID-19

GLOBAL CANCER COALITIONS NETWORK

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Global Cancer Coalitions Network (GCCN) represents over 775 cancer patient organisations serving over 14 million patients worldwide. A 2021 survey identified major disruption to income, workforce, and services threatening sustainability. Five years on, the extent of recovery remains under strain.

AIM

To assess the lasting impact of COVID-19 on cancer patient organisations across working practices, income, patient services, research, and health systems.

STRATEGY/TACTICS

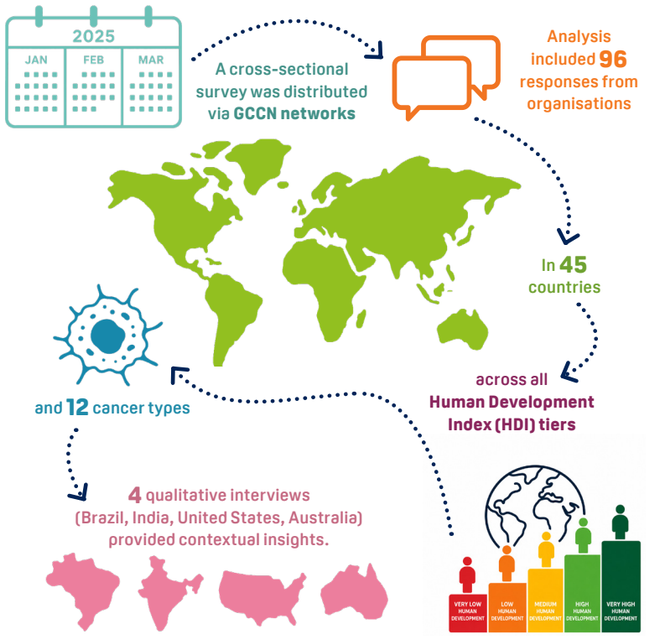
A mixed-methods global survey, building on 2021 data, was used to assess organisational capacity, demand, and sustainability across settings, positioning patient organisations as key actors in cancer system recovery.

PROGRAMME/POLICY

Findings highlight the need for policymakers to address funding gaps, integrate patient organisations into recovery planning, and tackle persistent inequities in cancer care, particularly in lower-resource settings.

PROCESS

A cross-sectional survey was distributed via GCCN networks (January – March 2025). Analysis included 96 responses from organisations in 45 countries across all Human Development Index (HDI) tiers and 12 cancer types. Four qualitative interviews (Brazil, India, United States, Australia) provided contextual insights.



OUTCOMES

Organisations report adaptation but continued strain. Demand has increased, with 69.1% reporting higher levels than before the pandemic. Financial recovery lags: 62.8% report income static or declining (71.8% among small organisations), and 42.3% say income is insufficient to meet patient needs—rising to 81.0% in low- to high-HDI countries versus 28.1% in very high-HDI countries. Workforce capacity has largely recovered, with 82.0% reporting staffing at or above pre-pandemic levels and 46.7% increased volunteer engagement. Hybrid working is now permanent for 49.2%.

Research remains constrained: only 13.7% report increased investment, while 31.4% report reduced or discontinued activity. Respondents estimate an average three-year setback in diagnosis and treatment, increasing to four years in lower HDI settings. One third believe policymakers risk repeating pandemic-era failures.

WHAT WAS LEARNED

Cancer patient organisations have adapted service delivery, but recovery is uneven. Rising demand, constrained funding, and persistent inequities, especially in lower-resource settings, limit their ability to meet patient needs. Continued disruption to research and care indicates a prolonged system impact. Policymakers should integrate patient organisations into recovery planning, and all stakeholders should work to address funding gaps to support equitable cancer care.

- Demand has increased, with **69.1%** reporting higher levels than before the pandemic.
- Financial recovery lags: **62.8%** report income static or declining
- **42.3%** say income is insufficient to meet patient needs
- **82.0%** reporting staffing at or above pre-pandemic levels
- **46.7%** increased volunteer engagement
- Hybrid working is now permanent for **49.2%**
- Only **13.7%** report increased investment, while **31.4%** report reduced or discontinued activity
- Respondents estimate an average three-year setback in diagnosis and treatment, increasing to four years in lower HDI settings
- **One third** believe policymakers risk repeating pandemic-era failures

GCCN MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

ABC GlobAlliance · Global Colon Cancer Association · Global Lung Cancer Coalition · International Brain Tumour Alliance · Lymphoma Coalition · IKCC International Kidney Cancer Coalition · World Ovarian Cancer Coalition · World Bladder Cancer Patient Coalition · World Pancreatic Cancer Coalition