

Blood cancers climb ranks to now become second most diagnosed cancers and second highest cause of cancer-related deaths in Australia

The Leukaemia Foundation is today releasing alarming new figures confirming that blood cancers combined are now the second most diagnosed cancers in Australia, and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths in the country[i].

After an extraordinary 30% increase in incidence rates of blood cancer over the past decade, these latest rankings come at a time when the organisation is also experiencing a massive 30% increase in demand for its services as more Australians living with blood cancer than ever before reach out for support.

On his first day as the Leukaemia Foundation's newly-appointed CEO, Chris Tanti says this sobering combination makes the 2021 World's Greatest Shave campaign, launching today, one of the most critically important in the organisation's history to help Australia's leading blood cancer charity keep pace.

"These new findings confirm that we really are dealing with some of the nation's most diagnosed and deadly cancer killers – and that there is simply no time to waste to cure and conquer blood cancer," he said.

"Last year alone, 17,321 people were diagnosed with a blood cancer such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma, and we know that come 2035, more than twice as many Australians will be diagnosed with one annually – which means more people than ever are going to be seeking the Leukaemia Foundation's support into the future[ii].

With the Leukaemia Foundation continuing to face a devastating shortfall of donations due to the impact of COVID-19, those taking part in this year's World's Greatest Shave will make an extraordinary difference by fundraising toward a collective target of \$15 million in 2021.

Now in its 23rd year, the campaign is the single biggest source of revenue for the organisation since it started in 1998 as Shave for a Cure.

"There has never been a more vital time to get behind the World's Greatest Shave to raise much-needed funds for the Leukaemia Foundation to continue answering the call of families across the country impacted by this complex set of diseases," Mr Tanti said.

In Australia today, 47 Australians will be told they have a blood cancer, and 15 people will lose their battle with the disease, with blood cancer claiming the lives of more than 5,600 people each year. Blood cancer also continues to remain the most commonly diagnosed childhood cancer accounting for over 40% of all diagnoses[iii].

"As we lead into World Cancer Day this Thursday, we gain a clearer understanding through these latest figures the enormous size, scale and impact of blood cancer. You only have to mention leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma and you'll soon come across someone who's faced blood cancer themselves, or who knows and loves someone who's been diagnosed," Mr Tanti said.

Blood cancer does not discriminate. It can develop in anyone, can occur at any age and at any stage of life across all states and territories, from children to adolescents and young adults to working adults with families and older Australians. Sadly, there are no screening programs available for blood cancers and there is no way to prevent blood cancer through lifestyle change.

Mr Tanti said the Leukaemia Foundation is bracing for a spike in blood cancer diagnoses as COVID-19 restrictions ease and more Australians seek health check-ups, potentially receiving the gutting news that they have blood cancer in the process.

“Blood cancer symptoms can sometimes be subtle or similar to other conditions such as a virus, often making it a silent disease that can be tricky to catch - but if it remains unchecked, the consequences can be devastating,” he said.

“The reality is blood cancer doesn’t stop for a global pandemic and we know for every day since COVID-19 began, another 47 Australians would have developed blood cancer even if they don’t yet know it.

“That is why we are urging Australians not to postpone trips to their doctor and to address any health concerns immediately. Ongoing symptoms such as recurrent infections, increased fatigue or bruising or enlarged lymph nodes should be urgently discussed with your GP.”

Money raised from World’s Greatest Shave not only supports families impacted by blood cancer, but it also helps research scientists continue their search for better ways to diagnose and treat blood cancer more effectively.

“The Leukaemia Foundation will not stand idly by while blood cancer continues to take so many lives. It’s time to turn the tables on blood cancer and to realise our goal of zero lives lost to blood cancer by 2035. We urge all Australians to join with us in taking a stand against blood cancer by rallying together, signing up to World’s Greatest Shave, and bravely shaving their head in 2021,” Mr Tanti said.

Officially ramping up to ‘Shave Week’ between March 10-14, join the fight against blood cancer and register by downloading the app, signing up online at www.worldsgreatestshave.com or call 1800 500 088 for more information. #worldsgreatestshave #shaveforacure #shavechallenge

ENDS

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

[i] <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer/cancer-data-in-australia/contents/summary>

[ii] <https://www.leukaemia.org.au/how-we-can-help/advocacy-and-policy/state-of-the-nation/>

[iii] <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer/cancer-data-in-australia/contents/summary>

For further information, images, footage or to interview a Leukaemia Foundation spokesperson or an Australian impacted by blood cancer, please email media@leukaemia.org.au or call 0427 251 452 (NSW, SA, WA, TAS) and 0429 850 562 (QLD, VIC, ACT, NT)

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