

Investment in cancer strategy saves money and lives

Cancer affects an increasing number of Finns. Without proactive measures, the economic burden of cancer will grow rapidly. Systematic implementation of the National Cancer Strategy and the related roadmap is estimated to generate savings of at least approximately EUR 298 million during the strategy period. However, even more relevant are its long-term outcomes: the strategy will help to improve care outcomes and equality, as well as mitigate the increase in costs inevitably incurred due to cancer.

The implementation of the National Cancer Strategy must be included in the next Government Programme, and a budget of **EUR 139 million must be reserved for its implementation for the next five years.**

- In the coming years, an increasing number of Finns will develop cancer, with an increasingly large proportion of the population living long periods with cancer or in remission. **The number of new cancer cases is expected to increase by approximately 20%, reaching nearly 45,000 cases by 2035. At the same time, the number of people diagnosed with cancer or who have survived cancer is estimated to climb to 480,000.** Around one in three people developing cancer is of working age.

- Unless further measures are taken, the burden caused by cancer will grow more rapidly than the healthcare system's capacity to respond to it. **Without measures, cancer treatment costs are projected to increase from the 2023 level (1.4 billion) by as much as 58% (2.2 billion) by 2035.** This growth is considerably faster compared to other healthcare and social services expenditure.

- The prevention, diagnostics and treatment of cancer are not equally accessible across Finland. Research has shown that factors such as a person's socio-economic background and place of residence influence cancer detection, access to treatment and treatment outcomes. Without nationally uniform operating models, there is a risk that regional differences and gaps between population groups will continue to increase further.

- Finland is lagging behind other Nordic countries in cancer treatment outcomes, development of cancer care and clinical trials. In other Nordic countries, advancements in cancer care have long been steered by national cancer strategies and programmes, which have enabled systematic and long-term efforts.



What can cancer strategy implementation achieve?

Patients:
earlier diagnosis, timely and more effective treatment and better prognosis

Early detection improves the prognosis and quality of life of people who have developed cancer and reduces the need for intensive treatments. Patients are examined in a timely manner and receive effective treatment most suitable to their situation on an equal basis, regardless of their place of residence or background. When cancer is detected early, it can often be surgically treated. Clinical trials also make new treatments available to patients.

Healthcare:
clear treatment pathways and improved capacity to treat a growing number of patients

Joint national operating models, clinical guidelines and treatment pathways improve competence, division of duties and consistent practices throughout the country. Monitoring the quality and effectiveness of treatment supports management and appropriate resource allocation. This allows streamlining care pathways and strengthening the capacity of healthcare to respond to the growing need for care.

Society:
work ability and functional capacity, containing cost growth and stronger research

The implementation of the National Cancer Strategy improves the health of the population and the resilience of healthcare. Better treatment outcomes support functional capacity, allow people to remain in employment, and help contain the increase in costs arising from illness and treatment. Investments in research and the utilisation of health data will speed up the development of new treatments and strengthen Finland's status as an operating environment for clinical research and investments in the health sector.



Four solutions for more effective cancer treatment

1. Cancer is detected earlier, and patients have timely access to the appropriate examinations and treatment.

Early detection of cancers will be strengthened throughout healthcare. Physician capacity will be increased in primary healthcare, and the introduction of a designated doctor model will be supported. At the same time, consistent national criteria will be determined for symptoms and referrals, the identification of risk groups and objectives for accessing examinations and treatment.

2. The patient's place of residence does not determine the quality or availability of treatment; instead, everyone receives the right treatment at the right time.

A permanent national operating model will be created for the preparation, introduction and monitoring of cancer-specific care guidelines and consistent treatment pathways. The consistent and timely assessment of new cancer medicines and their introduction across Finland will also be ensured. Wellbeing services counties will be provided with adequate resources and competence, and the conditions to make use of digital solutions and artificial intelligence in diagnostics and treatment.

3. Data will be used to improve the quality and equity of care and to allocate resources where they can have the greatest impact.

Cancer-specific national quality registers will be established, and the use of cancer data will be enhanced. Comparable data will indicate whether care guidelines are implemented, how quickly patients access treatment and which outcomes are achieved with the treatment in different areas of Finland. A systematic approach will also be established to respond to identified disparities and gaps, both within wellbeing services counties and at a national level.

4. Medical research findings are translated into patient benefits more quickly.

The conditions for conducting clinical cancer research will be improved, and the activities of regional research units will be safeguarded with sufficient physician and research nurse resources. CANFIN, an RDI centre for personalised cancer medicine, will be established. New molecular diagnostics and treatment solutions will be more rapidly introduced to patient care, and Finland's status as an internationally competitive country for cancer research will be strengthened.

Learn more about the strategy: National Cancer Strategy

What should the next government do?

FICAN

A budget of EUR 139 must be reserved for the implementation of the National Cancer Strategy for the 2027–2031 period

The objectives of the National Cancer Strategy, including containing the increase in costs, require an adequate initial investment. Implementation requires funding, especially for

- the improvement of timely cancer detection
- the introduction of national care guidelines and treatment pathways
- the development of quality and effectiveness data
- the strengthening and coordination of clinical research and individualised medicine and
- the timely and effective introduction of new treatments.

The National Cancer Strategy will ensure that the strategy implementation makes progress nationally and systematically.

Achieving the objectives of the strategy requires national steering and monitoring. As strategy implementation is based on cooperation between several national stakeholders, their roles, responsibilities and cooperation structures in the implementation must be clearly defined. In addition, successful implementation requires that key stakeholders, such as FICAN, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, the Finnish Cancer Register, wellbeing services counties, universities and organisations, have the mandate and adequate resources required for their tasks.

To be included in the Government Programme: To improve cancer treatment outcomes and treatment effectiveness, the Government commits to implement the National Cancer Strategy in accordance with the implementation roadmap. EUR 139 million in funding will be reserved for the implementation. Funding will primarily be allocated to measures that improve treatment outcomes, strengthen equality, support healthcare resilience, and enable translating research and new treatments into patient benefits.

To be included in the Government Programme: Clear roles, permanent cooperation structures and adequate resources will be ensured for the national stakeholders responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy

Finnish Cancer Center FICAN, fican.fi

The task of the Finnish Cancer Center (FICAN) is to plan and coordinate the national development of cancer prevention, diagnostics, treatment, rehabilitation and research. The contracting parties of FICAN are the wellbeing services counties, HUS and universities with schools of medicine.