

The Burden of Cancer among Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand

Dr David Schaaf, Principal Advisor Pacific
Florence Leota, Equity Whānau Centred Care Team



Overview

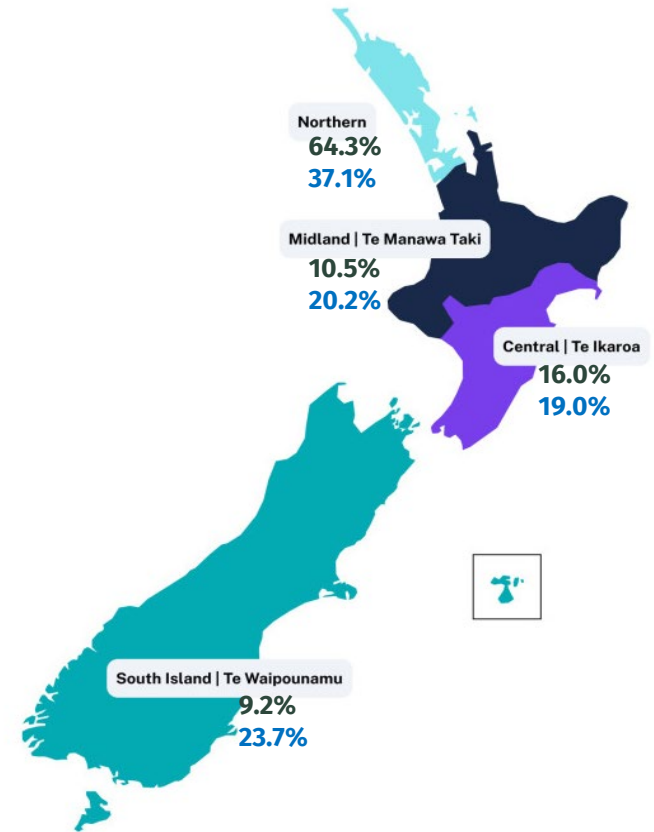
This presentation brings together:

- Population-level insights for Pacific peoples from the *State of Cancer Report 2025*; and
- Lived experiences and perspectives from Pacific patients and their fānau (families) in Aotearoa.

Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa (Census)

Census	1996	2023	Growth (%)
Pacific Peoples	202,233	442,632	119
Total Population	3,680,000	4,993,923	36

Health NZ region map

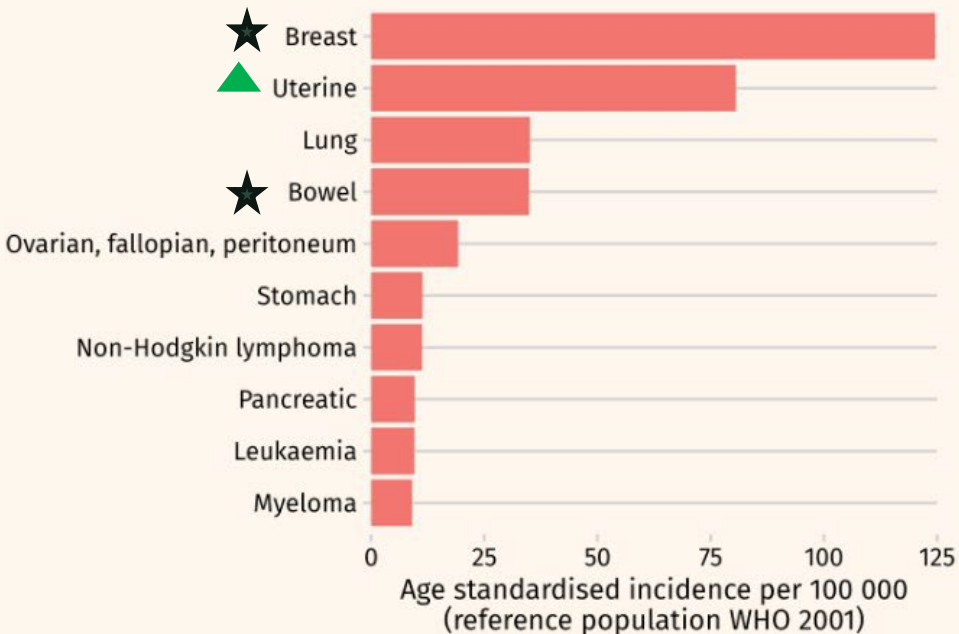


All cancer incidence rate in Aotearoa NZ (2001-2022), by ethnicity

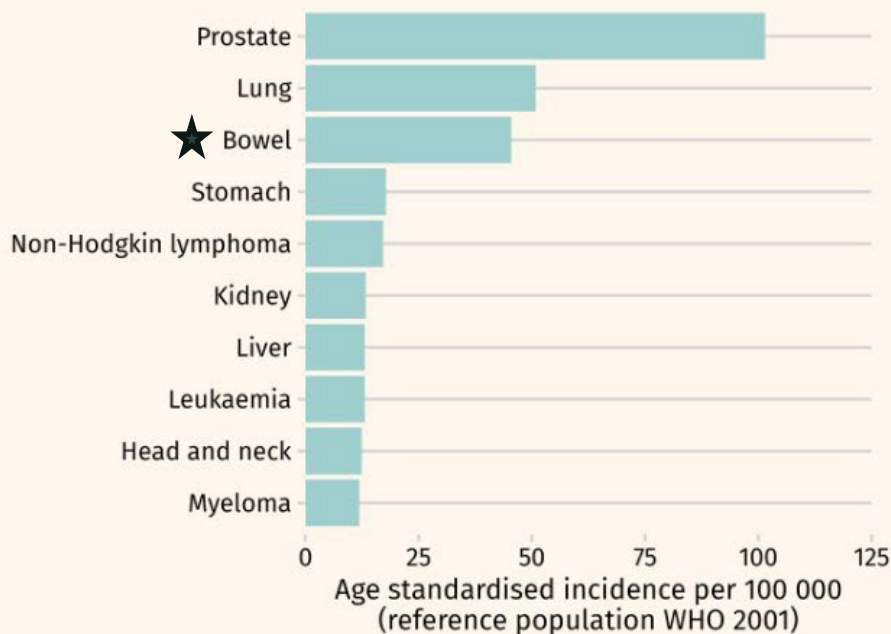


Ten highest cancer incidence rate for Pacific peoples in 2022, by sex

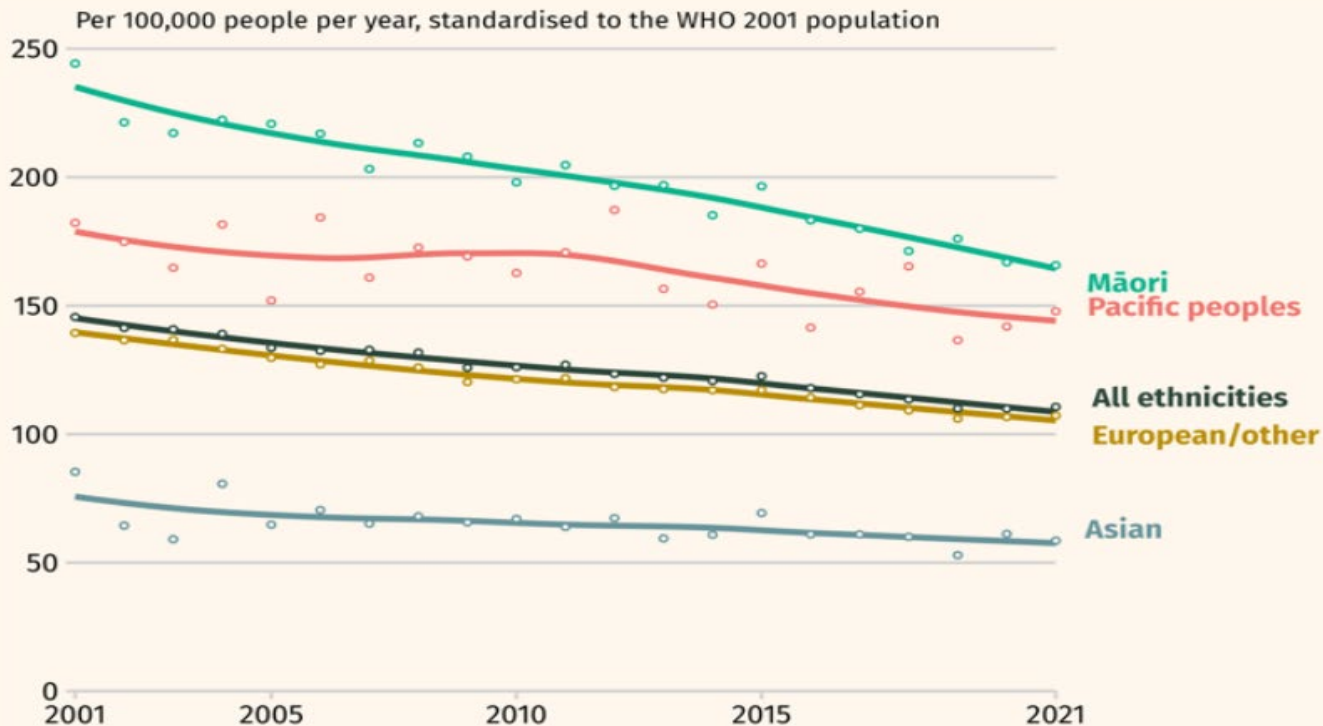
Female



Male

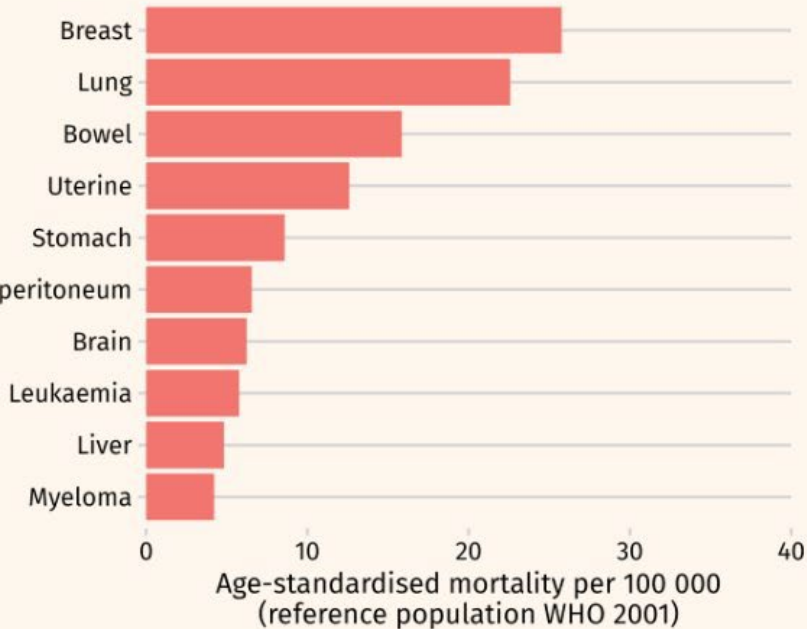


Mortality rate from all cancers in Aotearoa NZ (2001-2021), by ethnicity

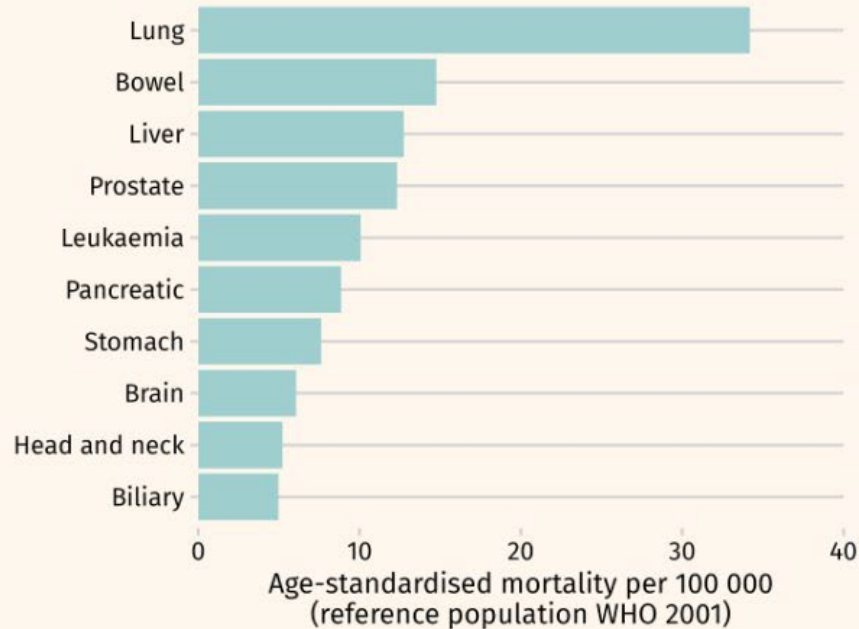


Ten highest cancer mortality rate for Pacific peoples in 2021, by sex

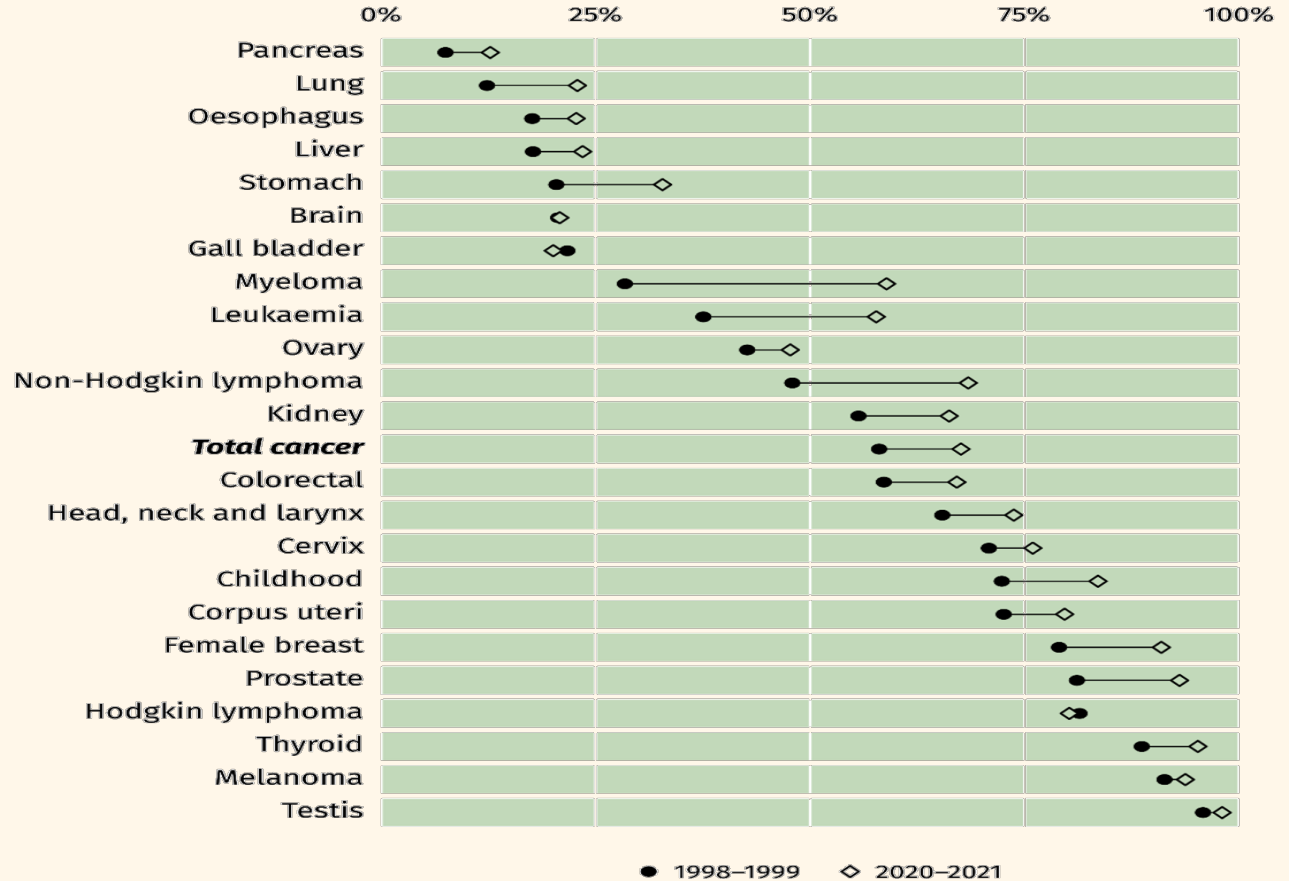
Female



Male



Net cancer survival at 5-Years in Aotearoa between 1998-99 and 2020-21



Key Pacific insights covered today

- 90% of Pacific peoples live in the North Island, 62% in the Northern region.
- Cancer incidence is increasing for Pacific peoples, unlike the plateaued or flattened national trend.
- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death, with marked differences between males and females.
- Five-year survival is improving overall; although ethnic-specific survival analysis is needed.

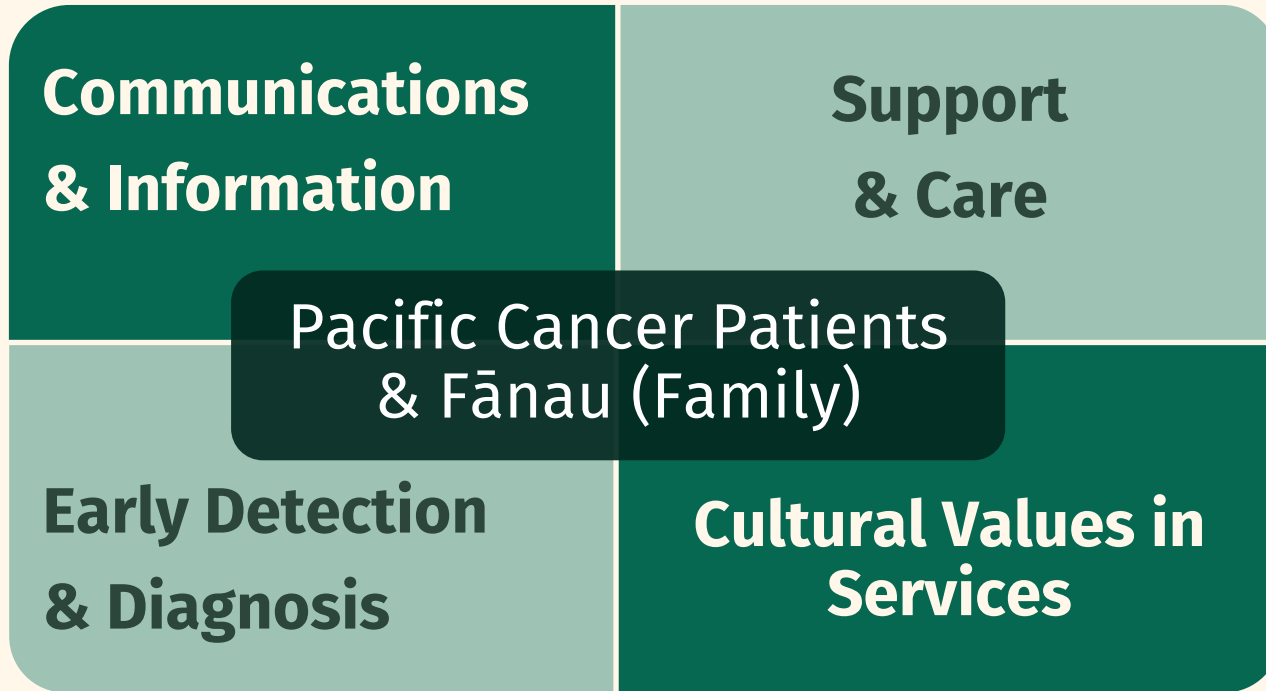
Overview – Pacific lived experience in Aotearoa

This section of the presentation:

- References voices of Pacific cancer patients and their fānau (families) on their cancer journey; and
- Reflects key insights gathered from qualitative research completed in Aotearoa and published in 2025.



Recurring themes



Communications and information

"...I was never offered a translator...my niece asked a lot of questions and made sure that I understood what was being shared...that made a lot of difference..."
(Male with liver cancer)

1. Clear and respectful communications between patients, fānau and health professionals.
2. Clear and accessible information on cancer prevention, signs, risks, healthier lifestyles and screening options.



Support and care

“... Knowing there was a lot of support for my wife and children... a big part of my recovery was knowing that she’s taken care of... You can’t look after me if my family is not being looked after.” (Male with bowel & liver cancer)

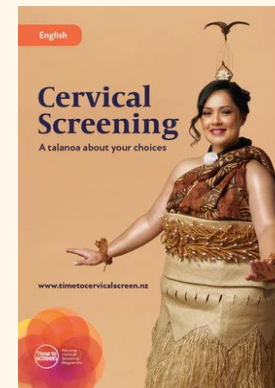
3. Acknowledge, recognise and support the role of Fānau.
4. Develop a culturally safe workforce across the cancer pathway.



Early detection and diagnosis

*“...Part of me was frustrated, I had gone to my doctor months before, and they kept telling me this and that, without any tests ... By the time they found it, I was stage four.”
(Male with liver cancer)*

5. Faster referrals for investigation from Primary care providers.
6. Greater screening participation for earlier detection and diagnosis.



Cultural values in services

“There was a mixture of cultural and clinical knowledge... when I was in hospital ... Mum came in with traditional medicine... I went through chemo as well.” (Male with leukaemia)

7. Recognise the use of some traditional practices being complementary to medical treatment.
8. Appreciate the importance and role of spirituality for Pacific patients and fānau.



Final comments

- The burden of cancer is increasing for Pacific peoples compared to European/ Other ethnicities. Inequities still exist and more work is needed.
- Screening coverage for Pacific peoples is low despite being publicly funded. Enhanced cancer screening and awareness programmes fit for Pacific peoples is essential.
- Pacific peoples are more likely to be diagnosed through emergency pathways, often with late-stage diagnosis. Earlier detection and primary care intervention are crucial to increasing survival rates.
- Future improvements require strengthened Pacific health workforce, culturally aligned information, respectful communication, and ensuring meaningful fānau involvement to achieve culturally safe, patient-centred care and decision-making.

Sources / references

Our thanks to the Pacific patients and fānau who took part in our qualitative research. We will continue to honour your voices in our ongoing work.

- Cancer - Pacific Fānau Perspectives 2025: *Moana Connect and Te Aho o Te Kahu Cancer Control Agency*
- The State of Cancer in New Zealand 2025: *Te Aho o Te Kahu Cancer Control Agency*
- Time to Screen - National Screening Unit: *Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora*
- Bowel Screening: *Bowel Cancer New Zealand*

