Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer:

Summary of the Public Consultation

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY | ECORRA EQUITABLE CANCER OUTCOMES ACROSS RURAL & REMOTE AUSTRALIA | Cancer Council Australia

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We would like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in public consultation of the *Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer* in the second half of 2025.

Deakin University and Cancer Council Australia, in partnership with an Expert Working Group, developed a draft Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer. This project is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing through the National Cancer Patient Support Program. This new OCP addresses the unique challenges and opportunities in delivering cancer care to people living in rural and remote communities across Australia.

The public consultation was undertaken to ensure key stakeholders shaped these resources and that the pathway truly reflects the needs of people living in rural and remote areas with cancer, with the aim of improving the quality of outcome, transparency of the development process, and to create a sense of shared ownership. We are grateful for the time taken and support for the OCP, and the responses highlighted a shared commitment to improving cancer care experiences and outcomes for people living in rural and remote communities.

The public consultation commenced October 1, 2025, and was open for a period of 3 weeks. Collectively, over 250 comments were provided from individuals and organisations across the cancer sector, including health professionals, peak bodies, non-government organisations, charities, consumers and academics. Feedback was invited on the three developed resources, (1) the Optimal Care Pathway, (2) Quick Reference Guide, and (3) Guide to Best Cancer Care, and they were reviewed for clarity, and relevance. 20 case studies were submitted as examples of models of cancer care that are being delivered in rural and remote areas for consideration for inclusion in the OCP.

All feedback was carefully reviewed and considered. Feedback was summarised and presented to the expert Working Group of over 30 people including multidisciplinary health professionals and people with lived experience of cancer. The feedback was discussed collaboratively to ensure focus on rural and remote contexts, reflection of best practice care, suitable evidence base and alignment with the needs of rural and remote communities.

Overall, there was strong support for the how the principles and the steps of the OCP helped to set expectations for working with people living in rural and remote areas with cancer. Written feedback highlighted several themes, which are summarised below, with a description of how we responded to this feedback.

What you told us	What we're doing
Consideration of other key population groups	In the OCP, we now clearly state that people may identify with more than one priority group, with unique needs that span multiple contexts. The OCP acknowledges that inequities can be compounded for those who identify with more than one priority group, and clear reference to other existing OCPs has been made where appropriate (OCP for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cancer; OCP for older people with cancer; and OCP for Adolescents and Young Adults (AYA) with cancer). This approach supports readers in navigating and applying the pathway, while aligning with population-specific guidance where relevant.
Workforce training and education	The *Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer* has been revised to reflect considerations of workforce training and education needs in rural and remote health settings, by acknowledging the role of workforce capability, and the need for both a rural generalist, and specialist, workforce.
Genetic testing	The sections on genetic testing and pharmacogenetics have been revised for clarity and consistency of language, with additional detail to reflect the equity challenges faced in accessing genetic testing for those from rural and remote areas
Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD)	Highlighting the relevance of VAD in rural and remote care contexts, the *Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer* recognition of the challenges faced by people in rural and remote communities in accessing VAD has been clarified. Explicit reference to VAD legislation in relevant states has been included, alongside references to supporting resources.

Care closer to home	Recognising the importance of supporting care as close to home as possible for people living in rural and remote communities with cancer, we have further outlined considerations for the safety of delivery of treatment and care options to support accessibility, continuity of care, and patient experience.
Representation of primary care providers	We recognise the breadth of health professionals who may act as primary care providers in rural and remote settings. We have reviewed and attempted to be mindful in how we refer to clinicians working in general practice, and other health professionals who may also be the first point of contact. This includes broadening references to primary care roles to acknowledge that these may be undertaken by clinicians other than GPs and ensuring greater clarity and consistency in how specialist roles are referenced and acknowledged.
Document structure and provision of additional resources	The *Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer* adheres to the national OCP template to ensure consistency and alignment with best practice care guides. Individuals and organisations are encouraged to adapt and operationalise the pathway in ways that reflect their local context. While additional materials may support implementation, services may develop locally relevant supplementary resources such as diagrams, flowcharts, or guidance tools that tailor to their local contexts.
Calls for funding	While funding advocacy and decisions sit outside the scope of the Optimal Care Pathway, we recognise the importance of equitable resourcing in supporting safe, accessible, and high-quality cancer care.
State/Territory-based recommendations and resources	The *Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer* has been designed to provide nationally consistent guidance, while allowing flexibility for jurisdictions and services to apply the pathway in line with local policies, legislation, and service models.

All three OCP documents were reviewed by the Working Group Chair and Co-Chair, Dr Florian Honeyball and Carmel O'Kane, and have now progressed to Cancer Australia for final endorsement.

Thank you again for your valuable insight and feedback in the public consultation. Following final endorsement and resource language translation, the Optimal Care Pathway for people living in rural and remote areas with cancer will proceed to launch and dissemination.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the following organisations that participated as respondents in the public consultation and consented to the publication of their names.

We also extend our sincere thanks to all individuals and organisations who contributed to the consultation. Your feedback has helped shape the optimal care pathway and ensure it is fit for purpose in supporting the communities it is designed to serve.

Australian College of Nurse Practitioners

Cancer Council Victoria

Cancer Voices New South Wales & Cancer Voices South Australia

Equitable Outcomes Across Rural and Remote Australia (ECORRA), National Consumer Program

Gather My Crew

Liver Foundation

Lung Foundation Australia

Melanoma Patients Australia

National Rural Health Alliance

Ovarian Cancer Australia

NEMICS

Palliative Care Australia

Primary Health Tasmania (HealthPathways)

Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC) Alliance

Project Collaborators: Equitable Cancer Outcomes Across Rural and Remote Australia (ECORRA), Deakin University & Cancer Council Australia

Funding: Department of Health, Disability and Ageing through the National Cancer Patient Support Program

Expert Working Group: This pathway has been developed with guidance from a multidisciplinary Expert Working Group comprising healthcare professionals, consumer representatives, and cancer care specialists from across rural and remote Australia.

Contact Us

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Related Links

Australian Cancer Plan

Cancer Council Australia - Optimal Care Pathways

Project Information

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