

Almost half of cancer survivors have ill health in later years

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Forty-five per cent of cancer survivors in Northern Ireland suffer from physical and mental health problems years after their treatment has finished, according to new research from Macmillan Cancer Support and Queen's University Belfast.

The report, the first of its kind in [Northern Ireland](#), also found cancer survivors and their carers are more likely to access health services than the general population.

The research highlighted that so-called "late effects" of cancer and its treatment can include [nerve damage](#), lymphoedema, extreme tiredness, [memory problems](#) and [severe depression](#).

The report also found that 40 per cent of cancer survivors say they have unmet health care and social care needs. Caregivers were also just as likely to report poor physical and [mental health](#) as cancer survivors.

The study found people who have had a cancer diagnosis reported more visits to their GP, more visits to the hospital, and more illnesses than the general population, often years following treatment.

With the number of people being diagnosed with cancer set to double by 2030, Macmillan says the report provides further evidence that action must now be taken to transform how health care is delivered.

Macmillan's General Manager in Northern Ireland, Heather Monteverde,

said: "Patients are living longer following their [cancer diagnosis](#) due to earlier detection, screening and better treatment.

"However, this report clearly shows that many cancer survivors continue to have poorer health often many years after completion of treatment. The fact that 40 per cent say they have unmet needs has significant implications for the future design and provision of cancer services across Northern Ireland.

"Of particular concern are issues around the health of carers who have also reported very similar levels of poor physical and mental health. The number of people living with cancer is growing every year so it is essential changes are made now to avoid serious problems in the future."

Dr Olinda Santin, from Queen's University Belfast, said: "While the majority of cancer survivors make a good recovery from their cancer, there are number of patients and their carers who may require additional support.

"There is a need for further research and service development to identify and support those groups of cancer survivors and caregivers who are affected by poorer health and well-being and who have unmet needs or experience late effects of their treatment."

The report found cancer survivors reported lower health and wellbeing scores than those who hadn't had cancer. They scored lower in areas including physical function, physical limitations, mental health and social functioning.

A quarter of [cancer survivors](#) said they believed there was a need for better co-ordinated care, while just over a fifth (21 per cent) said they needed more support to manage their anxiety about their cancer returning.

The report also found that 25 per cent of carers spend more than 22 hours per week providing care, often many years after treatment has finished.

Building on similar research elsewhere in the UK by Macmillan, the report shows people often experience serious health problems years after the end of their cancer treatment.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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