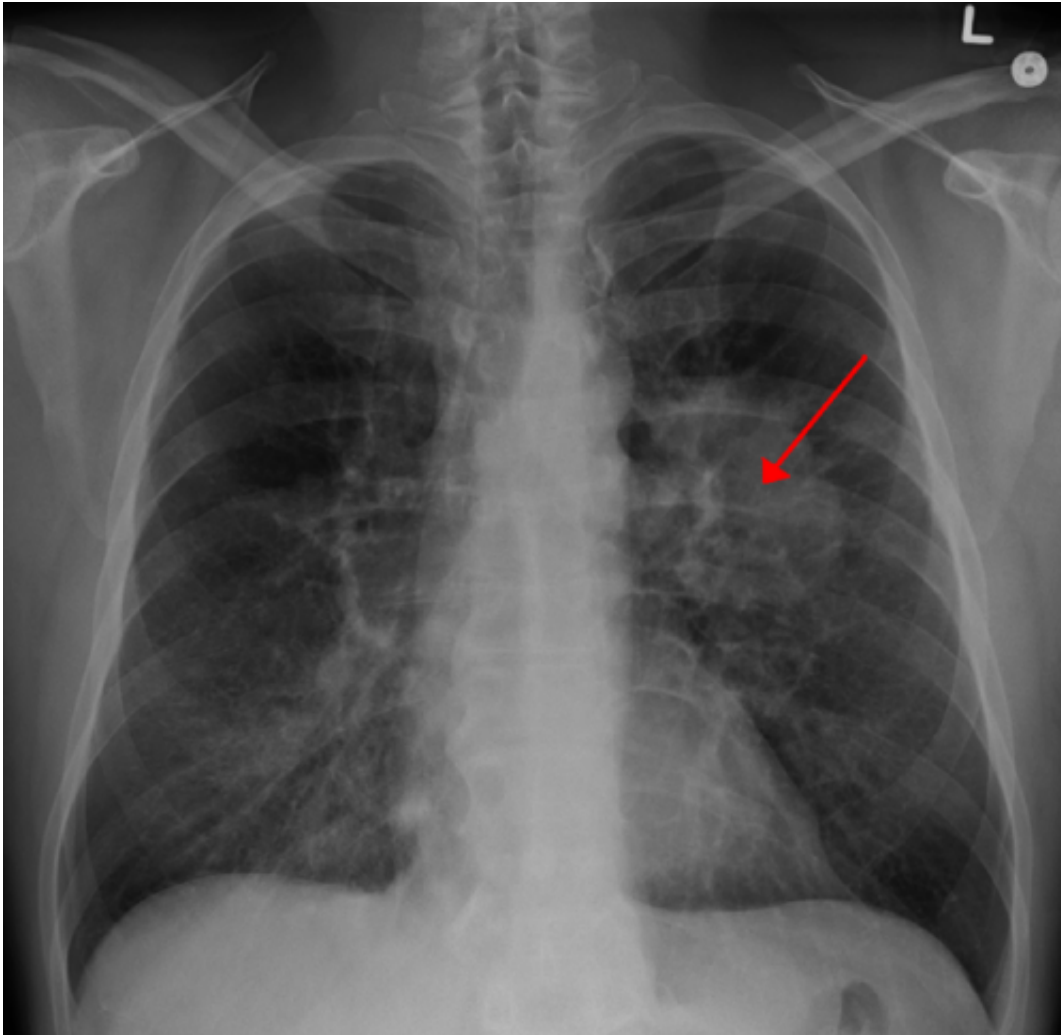


What is the cost of lung cancer in Germany?

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Lung CA seen on CXR. Credit: [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) James Heilman, MD/Wikipedia

With more than 50,000 newly diagnosed cases each year, lung cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in Germany. As yet, however,

very few statistics are available on the care situation of lung cancer sufferers and the associated costs. Scientists at the Helmholtz Zentrum München have now analyzed comprehensive health insurance data in order to discover the cost of the disease and which treatment has the best prognosis. Their findings have been published in the medical journal *Lung Cancer*.

As part of their research, the team of scientists headed by Dr. Larissa Schwarzkopf and Prof. Reiner Leidl from the Institute of Health Economics and Health Care Management examined data from more than 17.000 [lung cancer](#) patients (approx. 12.000 men and about 5.000 women). "Our results are based on national performance data provided by the AOK (the biggest German SHI Fund, which covers about one third of the resident population). Cases of lung cancer which occurred in 2009 were recorded and their development was then observed over a three-year period," explains first author Larissa Schwarzkopf. In the process, the scientists recorded operations as well as chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

20,000 euros per patient

The Helmholtz researchers, who are also affiliated to the German Center for Lung Research (DZL), discovered that the highest costs were incurred in the first six months after the initial cancer diagnosis. These were mainly attributable to in-patient hospital care. Consequently, outpatient oncology care played a secondary role. Average financial expenditure per case of lung cancer amounted to about 20.000 euros. However, this amount varied immensely, depending on the type of treatment provided. The striking feature was that one fifth of patients did not receive targeted cancer therapy.

Surgery offers the best outlook

Overall, the scientists found that about one third of patients received surgery. When compared with other types of treatment such as radiation therapy or chemotherapy (undergone by a total of just under 47 per cent of those affected by the disease), the outlook for this group was significantly better. However, the experts pointed out that surgical intervention is not always possible, nor is it always appropriate. In their view, there is therefore an urgent and growing need to develop more refined methods of early cancer detection in order to increase the chances of diagnosing the disease while it is still operable.

"These results mark the first step towards a better understanding of the health care and cost structures relating to lung cancer in Germany, and they are an important reference point," says Reiner Leidl. "In order to obtain a better assessment of the realities of health care it would also be beneficial to conduct a more precise analysis of the drug therapy used." For this purpose, the scientists plan to gather more data. Drug therapy in oncology is undergoing constant change, Larissa Schwarzkopf says. "It was only at the end of the study period that modern targeted therapeutic approaches such as monoclonal antibodies were integrated into [health care](#). These approaches play an increasingly important role – in both therapeutic and economic terms. In future it would make sense to conduct a comparison with our reference data."

More information: "Cost-components of lung cancer care within the first three years after initial diagnosis in context of different treatment regimens," *Lung Cancer*, [DOI: 10.1016/j.lungcan.2015.09.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lungcan.2015.09.005)

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