

# Childhood cancer rates increase with no change in sight

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The overall incidence rate of childhood cancer in Australia increased by 1.2% per year between 2005 and 2015, and is expected to rise a further 7% over the next 20 years, according to the authors of research

published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

The researchers, led by Adjunct Associate Professor Danny Youlden, Senior Manager of Childhood Cancer Research at Cancer Council Queensland, analyzed data from the Australian Childhood Cancer Registry for the 20 547 children under 15 years of age diagnosed between 1983 and 2015.

"The overall age-standardized incidence rate of [childhood cancer](#) increased by 34% between 1983 and 2015, increasing by 1.2% per annum between 2005 and 2015," Youlden and colleagues found.

"During 2011–2015, the mean annual number of children diagnosed with cancer in Australia was 770, an incidence rate of 174 cases per million children per year."

While the [incidence rates](#) of many cancers increased (hepatoblastoma [+2.3% per year], Burkitt lymphoma [+1.6%], osteosarcoma [+1.1%], intracranial and intraspinal embryonal tumors [+0.9%], and lymphoid leukemia [+0.5%], the incidence rate of childhood melanoma fell sharply between 1996 and 2015 (-7.7% per year).

"The overall annual cancer incidence rate is conservatively projected to rise to about 186 cases per million children by 2035 (1060 cases per year)," wrote Youlden and colleagues.

"Although the reasons for these rises are largely unknown, our findings provide a foundation for health service planning for meeting the needs of children who will be diagnosed with cancer until 2035.

"This finding is consistent with reports from other countries, raising questions about the reasons for the increasing rates.

"Greater investment in research into the aetiology of childhood cancers is required, particularly to identify modifiable risk factors," they concluded.

"Our conservative estimates of the future burden of cancer in Australian [children](#) may inform health service planning, ensuring that our youngest cancer patients continue to receive the treatment and support they need."

**More information:** Danny R Youlden et al. The incidence of childhood cancer in Australia, 1983–2015, and projections to 2035, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2019). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50456](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50456)

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