



WORLD CANCER DAY 2023 #CloseTheCareGap

THEME: "CLOSE THE CARE GAP"

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The Cancer Association of Zimbabwe joins the international community and the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) in commemorating World Cancer Day 2023, which is commemorated on the **4th of February** every year. This year's World Cancer Day (WCD) commemoration theme is "**CLOSE THE CARE GAP**". This theme runs from year 2022 to 2024 and it calls upon everyone to act accordingly in the prevention and control of cancer by focusing on reducing inequalities in cancer care. The theme reminds us of the need to work together to promote "Health Equity" in cancer care. In Zimbabwe, there are various gaps in the cancer care continuum from diagnosis to survivorship. Access to cancer information and management services is limited and greatly varies by one's economic status (poor/rich), area of residence (urban/rural), age (children/adults) and gender. The theme "**CLOSE THE CARE GAP**" calls for individuals, corporates, civil society and government to commit themselves to the reduction of the global cancer burden through improving comprehensive cancer care to all. This call is in line with Zimbabwe's current drive towards universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030. The UHC should be expanded to include cancer care and equitable access to health services.

"CLOSE THE CARE GAP" - IN CANCER AWARENESS AND CANCER LITERACY LEVELS: There are cancer knowledge level gaps in Zimbabwe because of common cancer myths and misconception. Health education is more pronounced on communicable as compared to non-communicable diseases. The lack of knowledge lead to delayed presentation of cases at health institutions. In 2018, Zimbabwe National Cancer Registry (ZNCR) reported that over 80% of the cases were diagnosed at advanced stages. Increase in cancer awareness can empower people to recognize early warning signs, make informed choices about their health and counter their own fears and misconceptions about cancer.

At least one third of the cancers are preventable, hence there is need to champion healthy choices to prevent and reduce cancer risk factors. Health lifestyle is helpful in reducing the risks of developing cancers:

- ❖ Tobacco and alcohol use accounts for 27% of the cancer deaths. Reducing the rates of tobacco and alcohol use including drug and substance abuse will significantly decrease the global cancer burden.
- ❖ Alcohol use has been linked to cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, bowel, liver and breast.
- ❖ Overweight and obesity are strongly linked with an increased risk of bowel, breast, uterine, ovarian, pancreatic, esophagus, kidney, and gallbladder cancers later in life.

Cancer awareness helps in enabling healthy choices in order to reduce the risks associated with cancer.

"CLOSE THE CARE GAP" - IN EARLY DETECTION, TREATMENT AND PALLIATIVE CARE SERVICES: Over the years, Zimbabwe has improved accessibility to screening of common cancer particularly cervical cancer. However, there are still pronounced gaps in the provision of screening for other common cancers such as prostate, breast and colon cancers. The prohibitive user fees, centralization of cancer screening and treatment services and breakdown of radiotherapy machines reduces accessibility to these vital lifesaving cancer services.

- ❖ Life-saving cancer diagnosis and treatment should be equal for all – no matter who you are, your level of education, level of income or where you live in the world.
- ❖ The availability, affordability and accessibility of cancer services need to be improved across the cancer care continuum. Early detection, diagnosis, treatment and palliative care services should be accessible to every citizen. This is important in protecting individuals and families from financial hardship as a consequence of out of- pocket medical expenses.

"CLOSE THE CARE GAP": - IN THE AVAILABILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ESSENTIAL CANCER MEDICINES: The majority of the common cancers in Zimbabwe can be treated, however, the cost of medication is unbearable to patients. Cancer medicines are mostly available in private pharmacies where prices are pegged in foreign currency. Very few patients are covered through private health insurance which partially cover the medication expenses.

The majority of patients pay for their medication through out of pocket expenditures resulting in failure to even commence or to complete the prescribed treatment regimes.

- ❖ Essential cancer medicines (WHO model list) should be availed through the public health pharmaceutical route and to be accessed at pharmacies at public health institutions across the country.
- ❖ Social protection such as Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTOS), medical travel warrants and food vouchers for vulnerable cancer patients such as patients without medical insurance, people living with disabilities, children and the elderly seeking cancer treatment, to be revived and sustained.

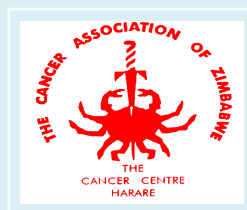
“CLOSE THE CARE GAP”: - **IN FUNDING AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION FOR CANCER**: Cancer control is both capital and technological intensive hence the need for sustainable local and international fundraising initiatives. It makes a lot of economic sense for a nation to invest in cancer prevention and control than dealing with the consequences. Failure to invest in cancer prevention means that the nation will not be able to cope with the increase in the cancer cases and this will retard development due to increased health spending. Cancer burden, if not controlled is likely to retard Zimbabwe’s progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Government investment in cancer prevention and control will lead to increased productivity and improved quality of life.

“CLOSE THE CARE GAP”: - **IN THE COORDINATION OF NATIONAL CANCER PROGRAMMES**

Zimbabwe cancer burden is increasing every year (ZNCR) and this calls for the need to have a national coordination mechanism that oversees the national cancer interventions in order to sustain the progress made so far and harness the current global innovations and opportunities in cancer care. This is because cancer is a very unique disease and its management is both capital and technological intensive hence requires a separate coordination mechanism at higher administrative levels. Discussions on the whether a “cancer council” or a mere “national cancer forum” suffices should be initiated and debated upon until a strong and well interrogated “national cancer coordination mechanism” is arrived at.

The theme **“CLOSE THE CARE GAP”** calls for the world to address specific gaps and disparities in cancer care across the globe in order to promote health equity. No one should be left behind and we all have a role to play in order to realize universal cancer care.

We therefore, take this momentous opportunity to urge government and its partners, members of the public and other stakeholders alike, to step up efforts towards prevention and control of cancer and improving the quality of life of those diagnosed of cancer by working towards closing the cancer care gaps.



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OUR VISION: Universal access to cancer information and comprehensive cancer management services

“We are committed to cancer prevention and improving the quality of life of patients, their families and communities through timeous, cost effective and evidence-based interventions” – Together We Can!