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Cancer Deaths Cost U.S. Billions in Lost Earnings Each Year

— Highest for older patients who developed lung cancer

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Premature death from cancer each year costs the American economy a staggering amount in lost earnings, new research found.

In 2015, 8.7 million years of life were lost due to early cancer death, amounting to \$94.4 billion in lost earnings, reported Farhad Islami, MD, PhD, and colleagues from the American Cancer Society in Atlanta.

As described in [JAMA Oncology](#), lung cancer was the most costly cancer to the economy (\$21.3 billion in lost earnings), followed by colorectal cancer at \$9.3 billion, breast cancer at \$6.2 billion, and pancreatic cancer at \$6.1 billion.

Lost earnings were highest for patients who developed lung cancer from the age of 50 onwards, while wages lost to leukemia were highest in patients ages 16 to 39.

Overall, the highest amount of lost earnings were among patients ages 50-59 (\$35.1 billion), followed by the 60-69 (\$24.3 billion) and 40-49 age groups (\$15.7 billion).

"Previous studies have shown that approximately half of all cancer deaths in the United States and a substantial proportion of deaths from cancer types with the highest economic burden in this study (e.g., lung and colorectal cancer) are attributable to potentially modifiable risk factors and that delivery of effective screening and treatment could prevent a number of premature cancer deaths," the authors observed.

To that end, Islami's group attributed screening and early detection of cervical, colon, and breast cancers as being a "major contributor" to the declines in deaths rates from these

cancers in the U.S.

But they noted that even here there remains room for improvement, and cited that while screening for lung cancer with low-dose CT has been recommended for certain heavy smokers, only 3.9% of eligible patients undergo screening. Recommendations from healthcare professionals can play a role in improving patient uptake, they said.

For their study, the researchers used data from the National Center for Health Statistics to calculate the number of lives lost in 2015 across the U.S. They also used data on annual median earnings of employed primary or sole salary and wage workers in 2015 stratified by age group, sex, educational level, and employment status.

In 2015, 492,146 patients ages 16 to 84 lost their lives to cancer. The mean of lost earnings for each cancer death was \$191,900, the researchers noted.

Across all states, total earnings lost were highest for lung cancer than for any other type of cancer. And a large geographic variation was detected between the various states in both person-years of life lost (PYLL) and total lost earnings, with states in the South and Midwest having the highest age-standardized lost earning rates.

The overall age-standardized lost earning rate per 100,000 persons ranged from \$19.6 million in Utah to \$35.3 million in Kentucky, and Islami's group estimated that if PYLL and age-specific lost earning rates for all states matched those of Utah, approximately 2.4 million PYLL and \$27.7 billion in lost earnings would have been avoided in 2015 alone.

"Implementation of comprehensive cancer prevention interventions and equitable access to high-quality care across all states could reduce the burden of cancer," the authors concluded. "Health care professionals can contribute to achieving this goal because they play a central role in the delivery of cancer prevention, screening, and treatment."

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Islami and team reported no relevant financial conflicts of interest.

Primary Source

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