

Article Summary: Cancer Survivors—United States, 2007

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The number of cancer survivors in the United States increased from 3 million in 1971 to 9.8 million in 2001 and 11.7 million in 2007—an increase from 1.5% to 4% of the U.S. population. Cancer survivors largely consist of people who are 65 years of age or older and women. Many people with cancer live a long time after diagnosis; more than a million people were alive in 2007 after being diagnosed with cancer 25 or more years earlier.

A cancer survivor is defined as anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer, from the time of diagnosis through the balance of his or her life. To determine the number of survivors, the authors analyzed the number of new cases and follow-up data from the National Cancer Institute's [Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program](#) between 1971 and 2007, as well as U.S. Census data from 2006 and 2007. The researchers estimated the number of people who had been diagnosed with cancer other than non-melanoma skin cancers (common, rarely fatal types of cancer) and were alive on January 1, 2007.

Of the 11.7 million people living with cancer in 2007—

- 7 million were 65 years of age or older.
- 6.3 million were women.
- 4.7 million were diagnosed 10 years earlier or more.

The largest groups of cancer survivors were—

- [Breast cancer](#) survivors (22%).
- [Prostate cancer](#) survivors (19%).
- [Colorectal cancer](#) survivors (10%).

Why Is the Number of Cancer Survivors Increasing?

The number of cancer survivors is growing for several reasons, including doctors' ability to find cancer earlier, diagnose cancer more accurately, and treat cancer more effectively. Also, better follow-up care after cancer treatment, fewer deaths from other causes, and an aging U.S. population contribute to the large number of cancer survivors.

Why Do Women Generally Survive Cancer Longer Than Men?

Women are more likely to be survivors because cancers among women, such as breast and [cervical cancer](#), usually occur at a younger age and can be found early and treated successfully. On the other hand, many male cancer survivors had prostate cancer, which is more common among older men who have a shorter expected lifespan remaining when they are diagnosed.

Why Are the Majority of Cancer Survivors Older?

The larger proportion of cancer survivors who are 65 years of age or older reflects the increase in cancer risk with age, and the fact that survivors in the older age groups include long-time survivors of cancer diagnosed at an earlier age.

What Public Health Actions Are Needed?

To reduce the impact of this increasing burden of cancer, medical and public health professionals need to address possible long-term and late effects of cancer and its treatment on survivors' physical and psychosocial well-being, provide them with coordinated care, and promote [healthy behaviors](#).

Citation

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Cancer survivors—United States, 2007](#). *MMWR* 2011;60(9):269–272.