

# Cancer Survival in North Carolina

Cancer survival rates indicate how often patients survive their diagnosis for a specified period of time—usually five years—after which prognosis is often viewed as good. Increasing these rates is consistent with national Healthy People 2010 objectives,<sup>1</sup> but survival has not been tracked systematically in North Carolina. Having this information would provide a much needed summary measure of the effectiveness of public health efforts and interventions, as increasing survival rates are associated with early detection and more effective treatment.

For this analysis, North Carolina cancer cases were obtained from the North Carolina Central Cancer Registry (CCR) which operates out of the State Center for Health Statistics under the authority granted in North Carolina General Statute 130A-208. All health care providers are required by law to report cases to the CCR. While hospitals are the primary source of data, the CCR supplements hospital data with reports from physicians who diagnose cases in a non-hospital setting, as well as pathology laboratories and freestanding treatment centers. Every year, CCR cancer incidence records are matched against the North Carolina Death Files and the Social Security Death Index. Using these matched data, relative survival rates were calculated using methods described by Ederer et al.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the five-year survival rate was 62.4 percent for North Carolina cases diagnosed between 1999 and 2005. The five cancers with the poorest survival rates were pancreas, liver, gallbladder, lung/bronchus, and esophagus, while the five cancers with the best survival rates were prostate, testis, endocrine, melanoma, and female breast.

Survival rates are an important indicator of cancer burden. This study lays the foundation for tracking survival rates in North Carolina, and thereby provides researchers, legislators, and public health practitioners another tool for evaluating the progress of cancer control programs.

## References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010: understanding and improving health*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.
2. Ederer F, Axtell LM, Cutler SJ. The relative survival rate: a statistical methodology. *Natl Cancer Inst Monogr* 1961 Sep; 6:101–21.

Note: The complete State Center for Health Statistics report upon which this summary is based can be accessed at: [www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/pdf/SCHS\\_163\\_WEB\\_070110.pdf](http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/pdf/SCHS_163_WEB_070110.pdf).

