



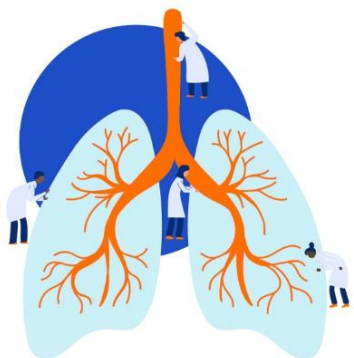
# BRIDGING THE GAP

## Enhancing Equitable Access & Innovation in Lung Cancer Care in South Africa

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**South Africa** faces significant challenges in lung cancer care, particularly related to treatment accessibility, early detection, and research funding. Despite having specialized centers in major cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, access to comprehensive care remains limited for rural populations. The National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill holds promise for expanding healthcare access, but its slow implementation is a barrier.

While awareness campaigns have made some progress, survival rates remain low, with a five-year survival rate of only 15%. This policy brief outlines the current gaps in lung cancer care and proposes actionable policy recommendations aimed at improving access to treatment, early detection, research funding, and palliative care across the country.



### INTRODUCTION

#### A Mixed Landscape of Progress and Challenges in Lung Cancer Care

South Africa's lung cancer care system reflects a mixed landscape, characterized by both progress in urban centers and significant challenges in rural areas. While specialized centers in cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town offer advanced treatments, rural regions continue to face barriers to access, resulting in late-stage diagnoses and poor survival rates. This disparity is compounded by limited early detection programs and insufficient research funding.

South Africa is classified as **Level 3 - Moderate** in the Cancer Care Maturity Framework. This reflects a developing healthcare system with some areas of excellence, but substantial gaps in others. Despite these challenges, the country has potential for significant improvement, particularly with the ongoing efforts to expand the National Health Insurance (NHI) and increase public awareness.



South Africa Ranks at Level 3 – Lung Cancer Maturity Framework



# LUNG CANCER IN SOUTH AFRICA

## Current Landscape and Systemic Gaps

The following table outlines South Africa's strengths, systemic gaps, and proposed policy actions for each key pillar of lung cancer care:

Pillar	Current Status	Strength	Policy Action
Early Detection & Diagnosis	Early detection programs are limited, with lung cancer screening remaining largely opportunistic.	Some awareness initiatives exist, but screening and early detection programs are not widespread.	Implement a nationwide screening program targeting high-risk individuals, with a focus on integrating screening into primary healthcare settings. Ensure affordability through NHI.
Biomarker & Molecular Testing	Limited access to molecular testing in specialized centers, with inadequate funding for research in this area.	Basic molecular testing is available in major centers, but not widespread or accessible for all patients.	Increase funding for molecular testing & research into targeted therapies. Expand testing infrastructure to include more healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas.
Treatment Access	Access to advanced therapies like immunotherapy is limited, especially in rural areas. National Health Insurance (NHI) aims to improve affordability but faces slow implementation.	In urban centers, advanced treatments are available, but rural areas remain underserved.	Speed up the implementation of the NHI Bill and ensure that all citizens, regardless of location, have access to advanced therapies. Prioritize accessibility in rural areas.
Clinical Guidelines	National guidelines for lung cancer care are in place, but there are challenges in the standardization of care across regions.	Guidelines are generally aligned with international standards, though implementation across regions is inconsistent.	Ensure that clinical guidelines are standardized & consistently applied across all regions. Provide regular training for healthcare professionals in both urban & rural areas.
Palliative & Survivorship Care	Palliative care services are inconsistent, particularly in rural areas. The Hospice Palliative Care Association (HPCA) is working to expand services.	Some palliative care services exist, but accessibility remains limited outside of major cities.	Expand palliative care services to rural areas, ensuring that all patients receive comprehensive end-of-life care. Increase funding for palliative care training and support.





## CONCLUSION & Call to Action

South Africa's lung cancer care system has made progress, particularly in urban centers, but significant disparities remain in treatment access, early detection, and research funding. The country's moderate cancer care maturity level reflects this divide between urban and rural areas. Addressing these gaps will require coordinated action across government, healthcare providers, and advocacy groups.

The slow implementation of the NHI Bill presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Expediting its rollout and ensuring that it covers advanced cancer treatments, early detection programs, and research funding will be critical to improving lung cancer outcomes across the country.



- 1 Implement a nationwide early detection program** to ensure that lung cancer is diagnosed at earlier, more treatable stages. Target high-risk individuals, including smokers and those with a family history of lung cancer.
- 2 Increase research funding for lung cancer** by allocating a larger share of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) budget to lung cancer research. Focus on developing affordable, locally relevant diagnostic tools and treatments.
- 3 Accelerate the implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill** to ensure universal access to cancer care, including immunotherapy, molecular testing, and targeted treatments, especially in rural areas.
- 4 Ensure equitable access to biomarker testing** by expanding testing infrastructure in rural healthcare settings and training healthcare providers in molecular oncology.
- 5 Expand and standardize palliative care services** across the country, with particular focus on rural regions, ensuring all patients receive comprehensive support during advanced stages of disease.

While South Africa faces significant challenges in lung cancer care, particularly in terms of access to treatment, early detection, and research funding, there is considerable potential for improvement. By focusing on expanding healthcare access through the NHI, investing in research and early detection, and addressing disparities in palliative care, South Africa can dramatically improve its lung cancer outcomes. The country has the opportunity to become a leader in cancer care in Africa, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of location, have access to the best possible care and support.