

CHINA



# BRIDGING THE GAP

## Enhancing Equitable Access & Innovation in Lung Cancer Care in China

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Lung Cancer** remains the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in China, with survival rates alarmingly low and an increasing burden on the healthcare system. Although advancements in research and treatment availability are underway, stark disparities exist between urban and rural areas, especially in access to specialized care and advanced therapies.

Despite substantial investments in cancer research, lung cancer has not received the same level of attention as other common cancers like liver and stomach cancer. The nation's survival rates, currently below 20%, reflect systemic gaps in early detection, treatment access, and public awareness.

Yes, improvements are being made — particularly in urban centers — but far too many patients, particularly in rural regions, still lack timely access to diagnosis and treatment. This policy brief outlines the systemic barriers and proposes focused, scalable reforms to address these challenges and move China towards a more equitable, advanced, and accessible lung cancer care system.

### INTRODUCTION

#### A Disease in the Shadow of Inequity

Lung cancer is a major health crisis in China, responsible for a significant number of cancer-related deaths each year. Yet, the country's healthcare system still struggles with fragmented services, limited screening efforts, and inadequate access to advanced therapies, particularly outside major urban centers. Despite the growing capabilities of specialized cancer hospitals and the increasing availability of precision treatments in cities like Beijing, the vast rural regions remain underserved.

China is currently classified as **Level 4 – Developing** in the Cancer Care Maturity Framework. This means that while the country has foundational policies in place, such as public health insurance coverage and the beginnings of screening programs, the system remains inconsistent and underdeveloped in many areas. There is a critical need for coordinated action to reduce urban-rural disparities, expand early detection, and improve access to life-saving treatments.





# LUNG CANCER IN CHINA

## Current Landscape and Systemic Gaps

The following table outlines China's maturity level across key pillars of lung cancer care, identifies the systemic barriers present, and proposes targeted policy actions to address these gaps.

Key Area	Current Status	Barrier	Policy Action
Early Detection & Diagnosis	Pilot LDCT screening programs are running in select provinces, but national screening is not yet established.	Yes, pilot programs exist—but coverage is uneven, with limited rural access and low awareness among high-risk groups.	Scale up pilot LDCT screening nationwide. Expand public health awareness campaigns on risk factors and the importance of early detection.
Biomarker & Molecular Testing	Available in large hospitals, but not standardized across public health systems.	Yes, tests are available—but regional inequalities and limited insurance coverage prevent widespread access.	Standardize biomarker testing across the country, with full insurance coverage through Basic Medical Insurance (BMI). Expand regional diagnostic capabilities.
Treatment Access	Immunotherapy and targeted therapies available in major urban hospitals, but access varies by region.	Yes, advanced therapies are listed—but rural regions often face delays or lack access due to varying provincial	Implement uniform access to advanced therapies under BMI. Standardize provincial drug formulary coverage and improve logistics for timely distribution of treatments.
Clinical Guidelines	Clinical guidelines exist in some urban centers, but they are not nationally standardized.	Yes, some guidelines exist—but their implementation is fragmented, with a lack of consistency across different regions.	Develop and enforce national clinical guidelines for lung cancer treatment, aligned with international standards. Ensure consistent training and compliance.
Palliative & Survivorship Care	Palliative care services are emerging, but less than 30% of hospitals have integrated hospice care programs.	Yes, laws allow palliative care—but service availability is still low, especially in rural and underserved areas.	Expand access to palliative care services across rural areas. Increase hospice service availability and improve funding for home-based care.





## CONCLUSION & Call to Action

China's lung cancer care system is at a pivotal moment. The country has made notable strides in research, treatment availability, and the early detection of lung cancer in select regions. However, these advancements are still out of reach for many patients, particularly those living in rural areas.

Yes, significant resources are being allocated to cancer care, but the benefits of these investments are not being equally distributed. It is time for China to close the gaps and ensure that all patients, regardless of where they live, have access to the diagnostic tools, treatments, and supportive care they need to survive.

This is not just a medical challenge—it is a political and social one. With coordinated action and investment, China has the potential to significantly improve its lung cancer care system and reduce the nation's cancer burden.



### KEY POLICY PRIORITIES

- 1 Establish a national, risk-based lung cancer screening program** using low-dose CT (LDCT) for high-risk populations, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- 2 Mandate and reimburse molecular testing** (EGFR, ALK, ROS1, PD-L1) across all public health systems to ensure equitable access to precision medicine.
- 3 Unify access to targeted therapies and immunotherapies** under Basic Medical Insurance (BMI), eliminating regional disparities and procurement delays.
- 4 Develop and enforce national clinical treatment guidelines** aligned with international best practices (e.g., ESMO, ASCO), ensuring consistent care across the country.
- 5 Expand palliative care services**, especially in rural areas, to include home-based care and increase hospice service availability in hospitals.

Lung cancer in China remains a major public health challenge, but with bold leadership and targeted policy reforms, the country has the potential to create a more equitable and efficient lung cancer care system. With the right political will and investment in infrastructure, China can bridge the gap between urban and rural healthcare access, ensuring that all patients receive the care they deserve.