



Cairns Bhutanese Community Inc.

21 English St, Manunda, Cairns - QLD, 4870

<https://www.cairnsbhutanese.org.au/>

Email: cbc412@gmail.com

Reporting Cancer Awareness Session collaboratively delivered by Cairns Bhutanese Community Inc and Punya Foundation Inc.

In partnership between Cairns Bhutanese Community Inc. and Punya Foundation Inc., the inaugural Cancer Awareness Session was successfully delivered to a select yet representative group of the Bhutanese/Nepalese community in Cairns. A total of 29 individuals participated in the session, reflecting strong community interest and engagement in cancer awareness and health education initiatives. The session was held at the office of Centacare FNQ and was also attended by Police Liaison Officers representing the Bhutanese, Congolese, and Chinese communities in an observer capacity. The program was delivered on Saturday, 30 May 2026, commencing at 11:30 am and concluding at 2:30 pm.

Cancer is one of the leading causes of illness and death in Australia and continues to significantly impact individuals, families, and communities. The Cancer Awareness Program conducted in Cairns aimed to improve community understanding of cancer, encourage healthy lifestyle choices, and promote the importance of early detection and screening.

The session provided participants with basic knowledge about cancer, including how abnormal cells grow uncontrollably and may spread to other parts of the body through the blood or lymphatic system. Participants also learned about common cancer risk factors such as smoking, alcohol use, poor diet, lack of exercise, excessive sun exposure, genetic factors, viruses, stress, and environmental influences. The presentation highlighted that while some risk factors cannot be changed, many cancers can be prevented through healthier lifestyle choices and regular health checks.

Special attention was given to cancer issues affecting Australia and Far North Queensland. Australia has one of the highest skin cancer rates in the world due to strong ultraviolet (UV) exposure, making sun safety particularly important in Cairns and surrounding regions. The session discussed common cancers affecting

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Australians, including breast, prostate, bowel, lung, and skin cancers. Participants were informed that thousands of people in Far North Queensland are diagnosed with cancer each year, with melanoma, prostate, breast, colorectal, and lung cancers being among the most common.

The presentation strongly emphasized that cancer is not always a death sentence. Improvements in medical technology, treatment options, and screening programs have significantly increased survival rates across Australia. Early detection remains one of the most important factors in successful treatment outcomes.

Participants were educated about common warning signs of cancer, including unexplained weight loss, persistent coughing or bleeding, lumps or swelling, changes in skin or moles, unusual pain, long-term fatigue, and changes in bowel or bladder habits. Community members were encouraged not to ignore symptoms and to seek medical advice early.

The session also highlighted the importance of national cancer screening programs available in Australia. Information was shared about BreastScreen Australia, bowel cancer screening kits, and cervical cancer screening programs. Breast cancer awareness formed an important component of the presentation, encouraging individuals to undertake regular self-checks, understand bodily changes, and consult healthcare professionals if any unusual symptoms arise.

Additional discussion focused on healthy lifestyle choices and cancer prevention strategies. Participants were encouraged to maintain balanced diets, stay physically active, avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, manage stress, protect themselves from strong sunlight, and attend regular health checks. The importance of vaccinations such as HPV and Hepatitis B vaccines in preventing certain cancers was also discussed.

The presentation acknowledged that cancer affects not only physical health but also emotional and mental wellbeing. Family support, community understanding, counselling, and supportive healthcare services were identified as essential components in supporting individuals and families affected by cancer.

Treatment options discussed during the session included surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, immunotherapy, and supportive care services. Participants learned

that although treatment may involve side effects such as fatigue, nausea, hair loss, and emotional distress, supportive services are available to assist patients throughout their treatment journey.

The key message of the session was that many cancers can be prevented, detected early, and treated successfully. Regular screening, healthy lifestyle choices, sun safety, smoking cessation, and timely medical consultation can save lives. Community education and awareness are essential in improving health outcomes and reducing the burden of cancer in Cairns and across Far North Queensland.

Participants were also encouraged to access support services including local GPs, hospitals, Cancer Council Australia, Healthdirect Australia, and Cancer Australia for accurate information, screening, and ongoing support.





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