Hong Kong reports more than 40% drop in cancer-related death rate over 30 years

South China Morning Post, Sept 24, 2026

Health minister Lo Chung-mau outlines Hong Kong's 'remarkable' progress at the World Cancer Congress, being held in the city for the first time

Hong Kong has cut its cancer-related death rate by more than 40 per cent over the past three decades, the health minister has reported, as the city's chief executive renewed his pledge to make the city a hub for medical innovation.

Secretary for Health Lo Chung-mau outlined the city's progress in controlling the disease at the World Cancer Congress, which is being held in Hong Kong for the first time. Citing figures from 1993 to 2023, Lo said Hong Kong's age-standardised cancer mortality rate had fallen by more than 40 per cent. Over the past 10 years, the annual decline was 2.8 per cent for men and 1.7 per cent for women.

"This is a remarkable achievement, showing that Hong Kong is really making significant life-saving progress against cancer," Lo said during a plenary session at the congress.

He added that the progress had been made possible by government policy support, strategic planning, coordination and investment. Lo said measures including antenatal hepatitis B screening, vaccination for newborns and antiviral treatment had helped control liver cancer, the city's third-leading cause of cancer-related deaths. He said the number of new liver cancer cases had fallen by 8.2 per cent over the past decade, while deaths had declined by 7.6 per cent.

"We will gear up to enhance cancer control in a sustained, evidence-based manner, powered by biotechnology as well as policy innovation from the government," he said.

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu echoed Lo's remarks in a pre-recorded speech to the congress. He said the city's approach to cancer was consistent with that of the rest of the world, and that it had made "sustained progress" in preventing and controlling non-communicable diseases.

When Lee unveiled Hong Kong's first five-year plan last Wednesday, he said the blueprint complemented the country's 'Healthy China' initiative. He said the city would continue to attract leading global pharmaceutical companies and world-class medical professionals, and strengthen international exchanges on public health and cancer control. "That is the Hong Kong we are building – an international hub for health and medical innovation," he said.

The three-day event, which began on September 24, brought together nearly 2,000 healthcare delegates from more than 124 countries. Other prominent health officials attending the event included Dr He Jie, director of mainland China's National Cancer Centre. World Health Organization director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also gave a pre-recorded speech.

Dr He called for collaboration in tackling cancer. “Cancer remains one of the most severe public health challenges for all the countries. Facing this global health crisis, no country or institution can address it alone,” he said.

Solidarity, collaboration and shared innovation were the “most powerful weapon in the global fight against cancer”, he added, noting that the mainland had always been an active participant in and contributor to global cancer prevention and control.

According to statistics he presented, an estimated 5.15 million new cancer cases were diagnosed on the mainland in 2024, accounting for around a quarter of newly diagnosed cases worldwide. That same year, the U.S. topped two million new cancer cases, reaching that figure for the first time at 2,001,140 new cases, a higher rate than in China.

Lee announced last year in his policy address that Hong Kong would host the congress. The congress, held every two years, is organised by the Union for International Cancer Control, the world’s largest and oldest international cancer organisation. The Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society is hosting it this year.

[For the year 2024, the World Health Organization records 5,150,572 new cancer cases in China (4.1 times the U.S. population), 2,462,729 in the USA and 633,830 new cases in Russia (42% of the U.S. population). The top five countries for age-standardized rates of cancer that year are listed in order: Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, USA, Norway. A different source lists the top ten countries for age-standardized rates of cancer for 2022, in order, as follows: Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, United States, Denmark, Belgium, The Netherlands, Canada, France.]