

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Cancer deaths increase in South Africa – IRR report

A report published by the IRR has found an increase in the cancer death rate for South Africa for both men and women since 1994.

According to the report, the death rate for all cancers increased for men from 65.4/100 000 people in 1994 to 71.2/100 000 in 2013. For women the increase was from 51.6/100 000 to 68.8/100 000. Prostate, intestinal, and colon cancers showed particularly sharp increases.

The data was contained in a broader report the IRR released about the public and private healthcare sectors in South Africa. Research analyst Tawanda Makombo said: “Cancer is a lifestyle disease. Counterintuitively, the increases measured in the report would seem to corroborate other IRR research that living standards in South Africa are improving. The IRR has for example identified a significant increase in the size of the middle class over the past 20 years.”

According to Makombo: “The report identifies some real successes in the public healthcare system. Most notably these are around HIV awareness and treatment campaigns that have improved significantly over the past six to seven years. We see for example that life expectancy is again increasing after it fell sharply during the era of President Thabo Mbeki. The report found other successes in areas such as the still birth rate and infant mortality. The still birth rate for example fell from 27 babies born dead out of every 1 000 births in 2001 to 21 in 2014.”

He further added that there has also been a pleasing increase in the number of healthcare practitioners registered in South Africa. Since 2000, for example, the number of general practitioners increased by 79.9% while the number of professional nurses increased by 46.7%.

However the report also found shortcomings.

According to Makombo, “the diabetes death rate in South Africa is very much higher than that in a range of countries such as Uganda, Botswana, and Nigeria. The asthma death rate is also higher than a significant cross section of countries from Chile and China to Poland and Russia. The TB death rate, even that excluding HIV infection is also very high, and has increased from 38/100 000 deaths in 1994 to 48 in 2013.”

Ends.
