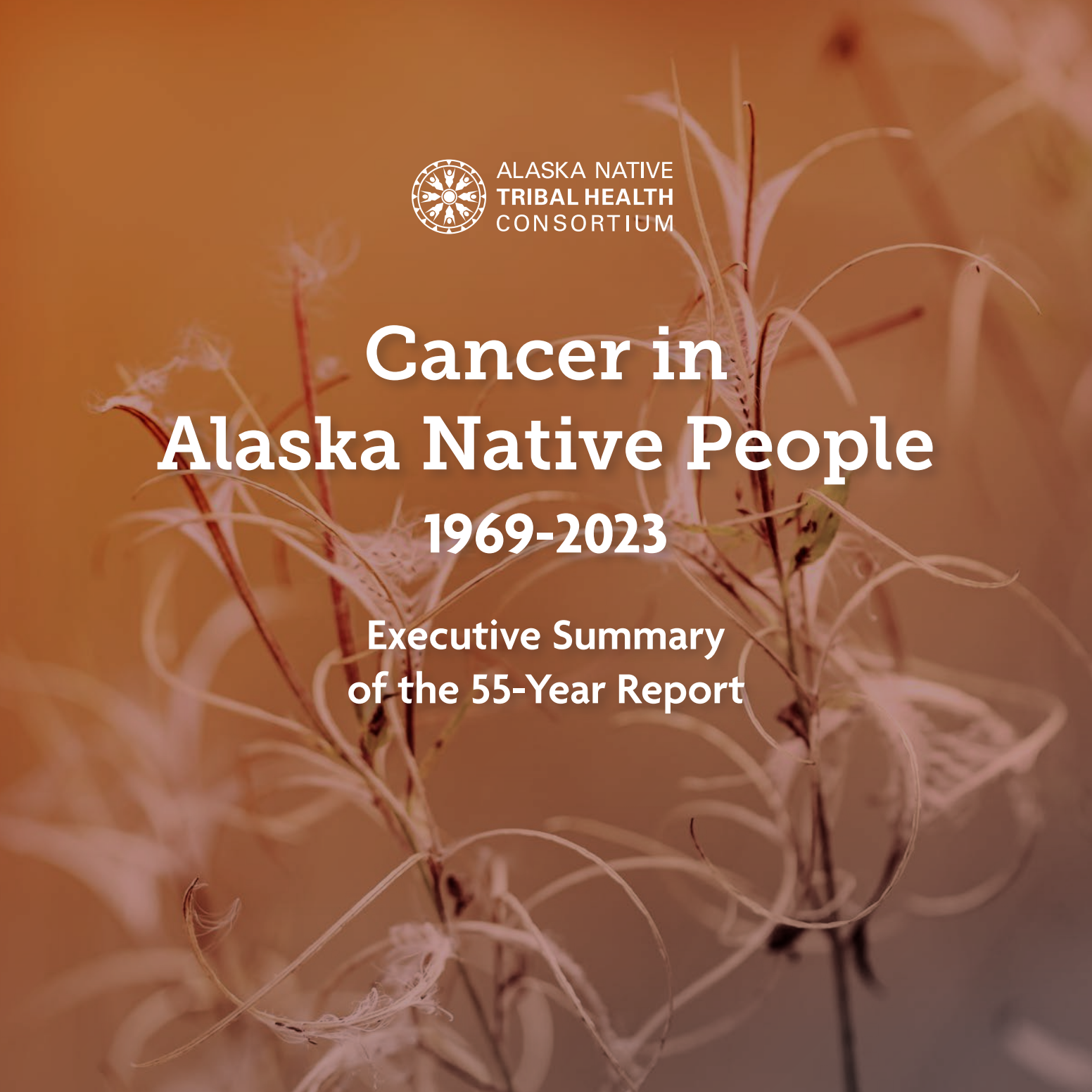

ALASKA NATIVE
TRIBAL HEALTH
CONSORTIUM
Cancer in
Alaska Native People
1969-2023
Executive Summary
of the 55-Year Report

How To Read The Data

Counts

Counts show the total number of new cancer diagnoses or cancer deaths.

Rates

Rates help compare populations of different sizes. Cancer risk is strongly associated with age; cancers tend to occur more frequently among older people. A population with more people in older age groups may have a higher cancer rate simply because it is older overall. Age adjustment accounts for this difference by calculating what each population rate would be if all populations had the same proportion of people in each age group.

Stage at Diagnosis

Localized stage: The cancer is localized (within) the primary organ site and has not spread to any other sites in the body.

Regional stage: The cancer has spread from the primary organ site, and into surrounding tissues and/or to regional lymph nodes.

Distant stage: The cancer has spread from the primary organ site to distant organs, and/or distant lymph nodes. Cancer at this stage is often harder to treat.

Data sources: Alaska Native Tumor Registry and the National Cancer Institute Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program. Full methods and detailed tables are available in the 55-Year Report.

Introduction

This executive summary presents key findings from *Cancer in Alaska Native People: 55-Year Report*, developed by the Alaska Native Tumor Registry at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. It highlights findings for cancers for which screening tests are available.

The Alaska Native Tumor Registry collects, analyzes, and shares cancer data to show how cancer patterns change over time, identify where the burden is greatest, and guide efforts to reduce cancer's impact.

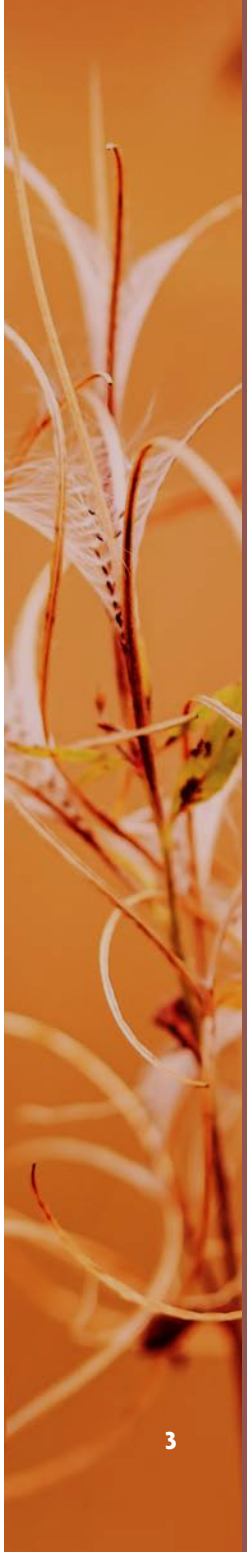
It is important to remember that behind each of the statistics presented in this document are individuals, families, and communities whose lives are affected by cancer. This summary honors those we have lost, those living with cancer, their families, and the Alaska Native Elders whose wisdom and leadership strengthen our communities.

What We Learned

1 **The rate of new cancer diagnoses is increasing over time.**
Between 1974 and 2023, the rate of new cancer diagnoses increased by nearly 30%, from 398 to 516 per 100,000 people.

2 **Lung and colorectal cancers caused the most cancer deaths between 2019-2023.**
During the same time period, breast and lung cancers were the most frequently diagnosed cancers among Alaska Native people.

3 **Early detection can save lives.**
Cancer was most often diagnosed at a localized stage. However, nearly one in three cancers were diagnosed at a distant stage.



Cancer Burden at a Glance

During 2019-2023, there were:

2,698
NEW CANCER DIAGNOSES

1,460
DIAGNOSES AMONG WOMEN

1,238
DIAGNOSES AMONG MEN

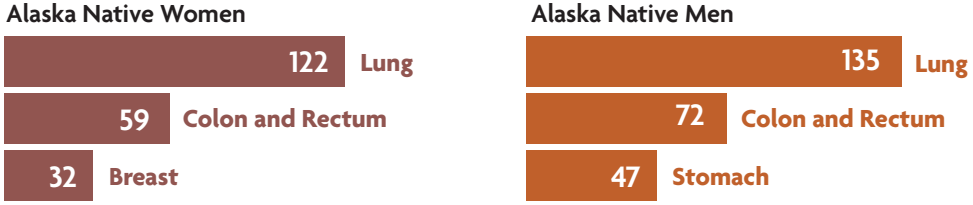
909
CANCER DEATHS

How does cancer in Alaska Native people compare with U.S. White people?

During 2019-2023:

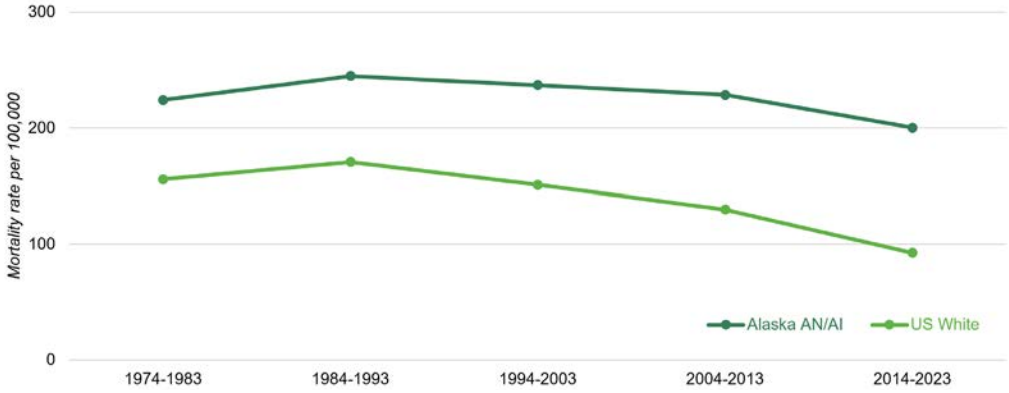
- The lung cancer rate for Alaska Native people was twice as high as the rate for U.S. White people. The lung cancer mortality rate for Alaska Native people was 3.2 times higher than the rate for U.S. White people.
- The rate of new cancer diagnoses is increasing over time among Alaska Native people. Though cancer death rates declined in the late 80s, the decline was much smaller than among U.S. White people.
- In 2019–2023, the age-adjusted rate of new cancer diagnoses was highest at the localized stage overall. Among Alaska Native men, the distant-stage rate was slightly higher than the localized-stage rate (196 versus 183 per 100,000).

Top Three Cancer Sites by Number of Deaths, 2019-2023



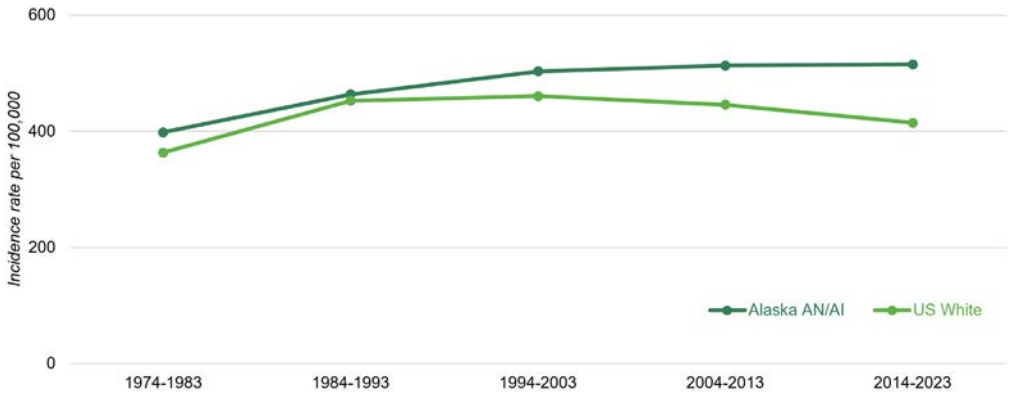
Cancer Death Rate

Ten-Year Mortality, 1974-2023
All Sites, By Sex, Race, & Time Period



New Cancer Diagnosis Rate

Ten-Year Incidence, 1974-2023
All Sites, By Sex, Race, & Time Period



Rates per 100,000 people, adjusted for age.

Data Sources: ANTR ADB, 2025 (Alaska Native People) | SEER RPD, 2025 (US White People)

Lung Cancer

During 2019-2023, lung cancer caused more cancer deaths than any other cancer among Alaska Native women and men. More than half of lung cancers were diagnosed at a distant stage.

393	257	55%
NEW CASES	**DEATHS**	**DIAGNOSED AT DISTANT STAGE**

Lung Cancer Rates Over Time

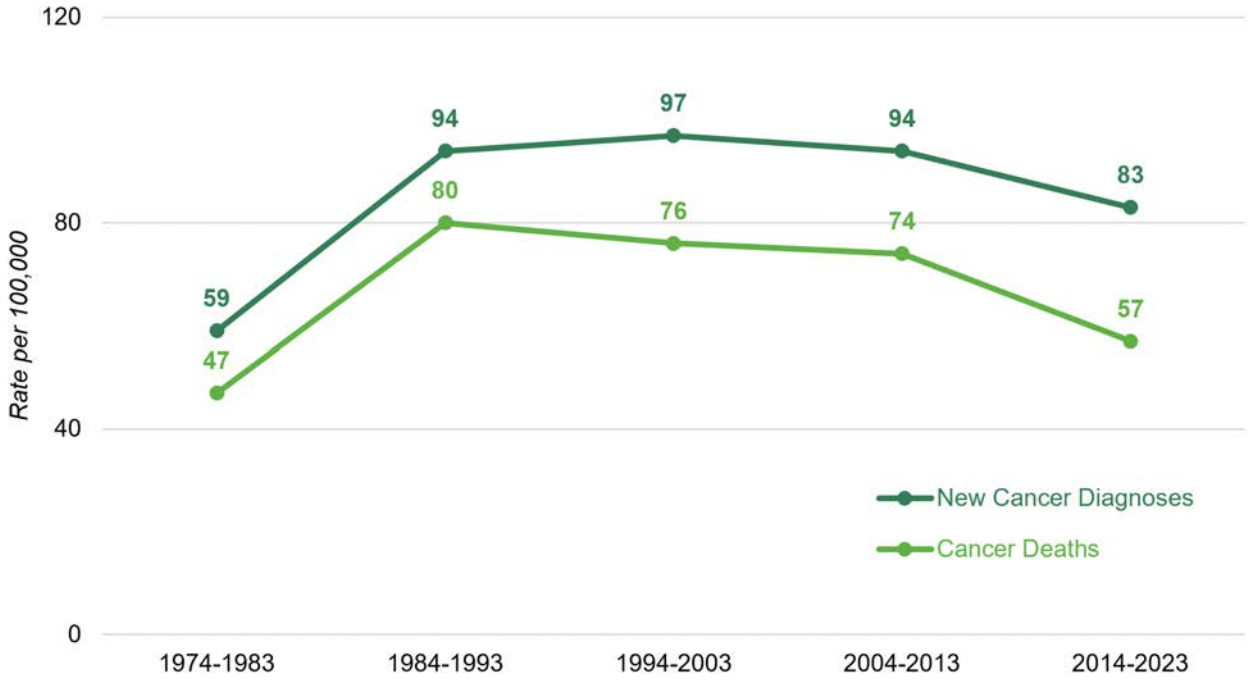
- Lung cancer new diagnosis and death rates have declined, but the disparity between Alaska Native people and U.S. White people has increased. During 2014-2023, Alaska Native people had nearly twice the rate of lung cancer diagnoses and more than three times the rate of lung cancer deaths compared with U.S. White people.
- The rate of new lung cancer diagnoses ranged from 66 to 144 per 100,000 people across Tribal Health Regions.

Priority Actions

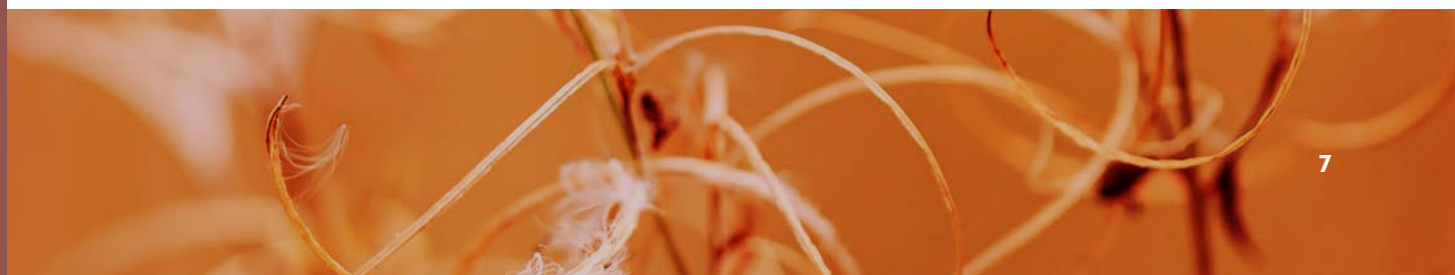
- Increase access to low-dose computed tomography (CT) screening for lung cancer among eligible adults.
- Help people quit smoking by ensuring behavioral health services and medical support are available.
- Increase awareness of lung cancer symptoms and screening eligibility.

Lung Cancer Rates Over Time

Rate of new lung cancer diagnoses and deaths among Alaska Native people, 1974-2023



Data Source: ANTR Analysis Database, Nov 2025 Sub
Rates age-adjusted to the 2000 US Std Population (19 age groups - Census P25-1130) standard.



Breast Cancer

During 2019-2023, breast cancer was the most diagnosed cancer among Alaska Native women.

432
NEW CANCER DIAGNOSES
2019–2023

32
DEATHS

66%
DIAGNOSED AT LOCALIZED STAGE
287 of 432 diagnoses

Breast Cancer Rates Over Time

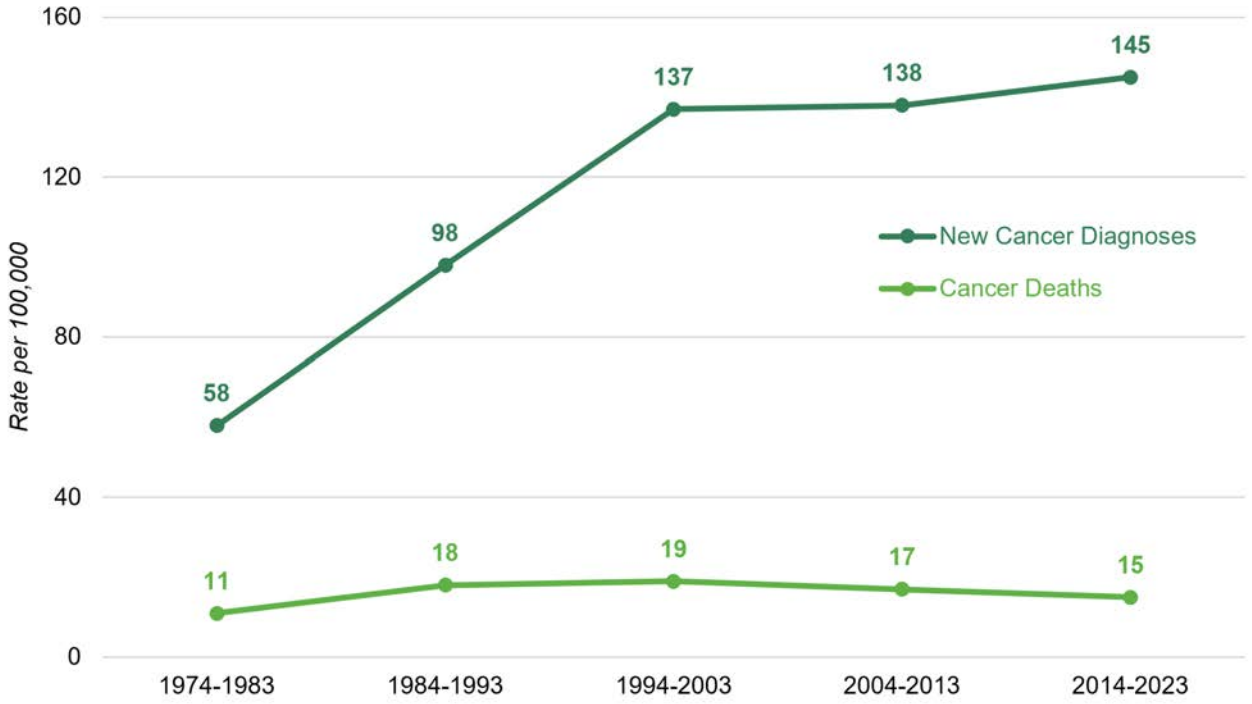
- Three out of four breast cancer cases were diagnosed among women aged 20-69 years, but the breast cancer rate was highest among women aged 70 years and older.
- The breast cancer diagnosis rate increased substantially over five decades (from 58 in 1974-1983 to 145 in 2014-2023); while the death rate has remained relatively flat.
- The rate of new breast cancer diagnoses ranged from 30 to 105 per 100,000 women across Tribal Health Regions.
- About two thirds of breast cancers were diagnosed at localized stage. This is important because treatment is often more effective when cancer is found at localized and regional stages. Still, 29 diagnoses were at distant stage.

Priority Actions

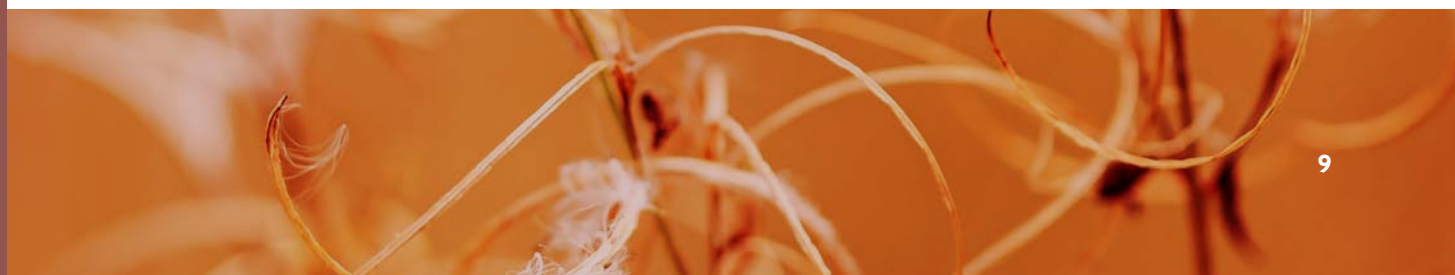
- Increase access to mammography.
- Help people understand when to start screening based on personal and family history risk factors.
- Provide genetic counseling and testing when recommended.

Breast Cancer Rates Over Time

Rate of new breast cancer diagnoses and deaths among Alaska Native women, 1974-2023



Data Source: ANTR Analysis Database, Nov 2025 Sub
Rates age-adjusted to the 2000 US Std Population (19 age groups - Census P25-1130) standard.



Colorectal Cancer

During 2019-2023, colorectal cancer was the second most common cancer in Alaska Native men and the third most common in Alaska Native women. It was the second most common cause of cancer death for both men and women.

381
NEW CANCER DIAGNOSES
2019–2023

131
DEATHS

27%
DIAGNOSED AT DISTANT STAGE

Colorectal Cancer Rates Over Time

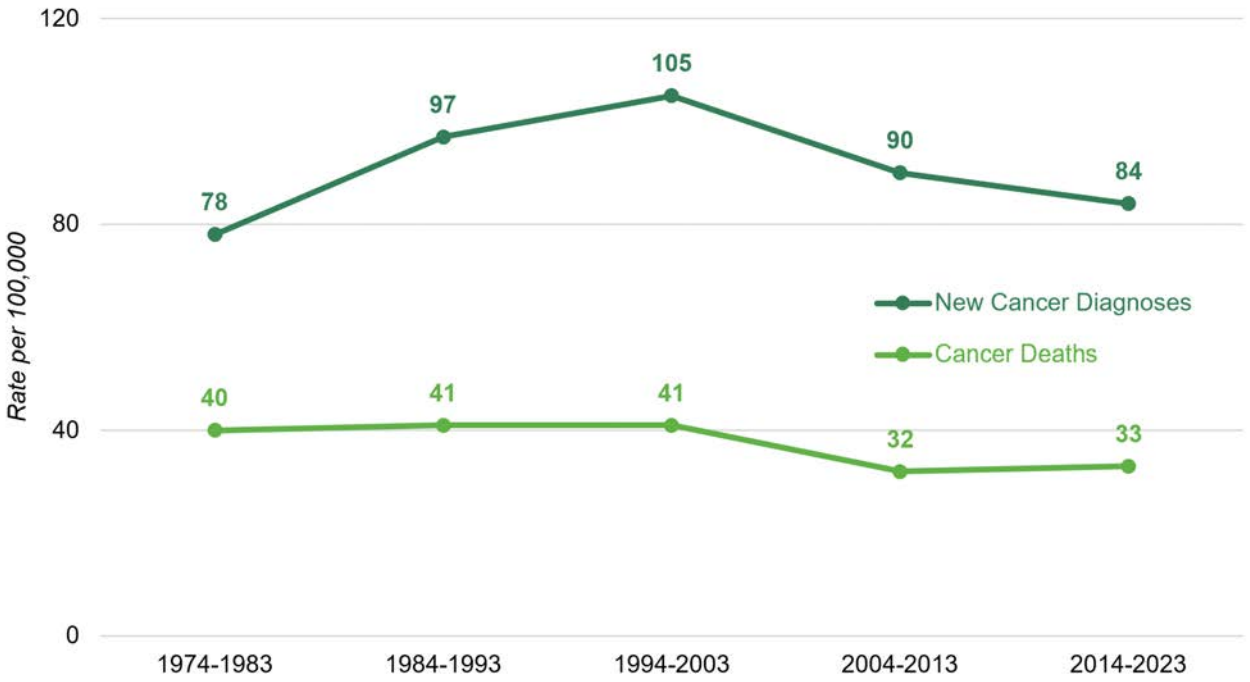
- During 2019-2023, there were 234 new colorectal cancer diagnoses among people aged 20-69 years and 146 among people aged 70 years and older.
- The rate of new colorectal cancer diagnoses ranged from 41 to 112 per 100,000 people across Tribal Health Regions.
- Colorectal cancer diagnosis and death rates have declined somewhat from their peak during 1994-2003, but it remains a leading cancer among Alaska Native people.

Priority Actions

- Increase access to appropriate colorectal cancer screening options at recommended ages
- Use regional data to direct screening resources and outreach.

Colorectal Cancer Rates Over Time

Rate of new colorectal cancer diagnoses and deaths among Alaska Native people, 1974-2023



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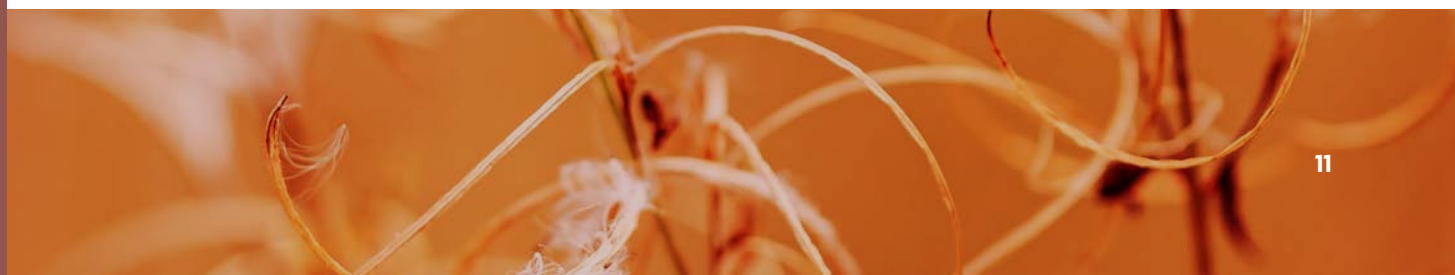


Prostate Cancer

During 2019-2023, prostate cancer was the third most diagnosed cancer among Alaska Native men.

192
NEW CASES
2019–2023

20
DEATHS

61%
DIAGNOSED AT LOCALIZED STAGE

Prostate Cancer Rates Over Time

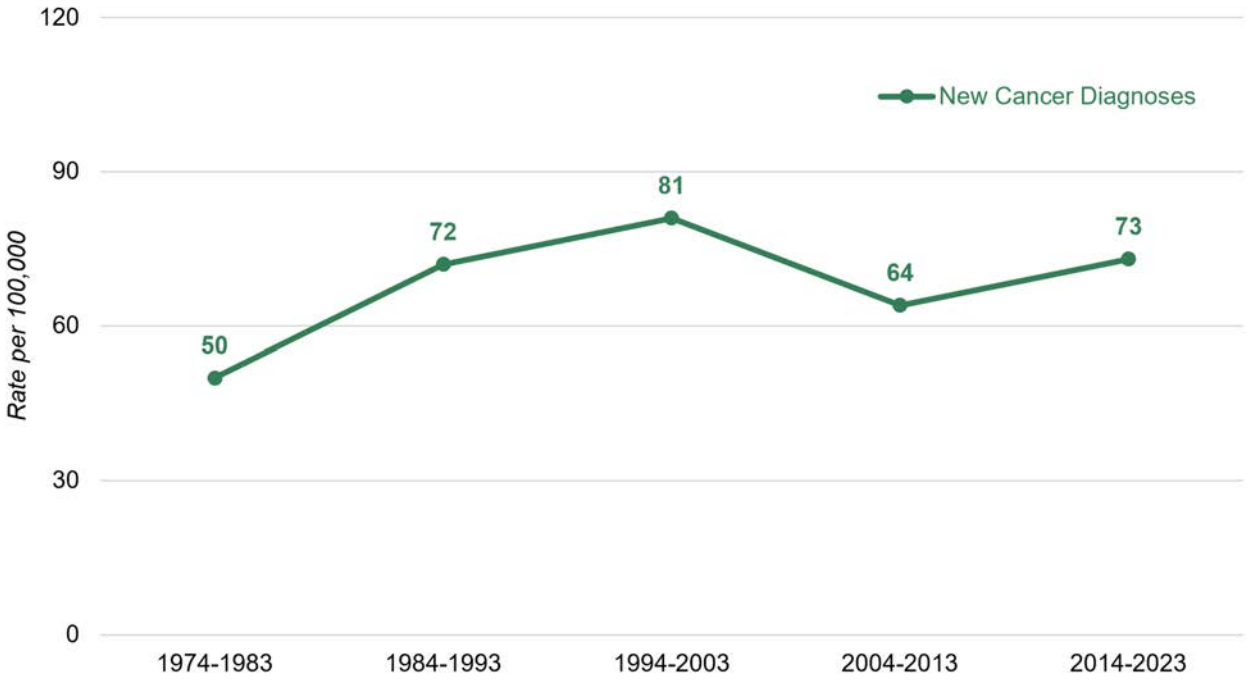
- Most prostate cancers were diagnosed at localized stage. However, 34 were diagnosed at distant stage, and the distant-stage rate was 1.5 times the rate among U.S. White people.
- The new diagnosis rate increased over five decades.
- The overall prostate cancer diagnosis rate was lower among Alaska Native men than among U.S. White men, while the cancer death rate was nearly twice as high. This difference highlights the importance of examining stage at diagnosis, access to screening and treatment, and follow-up over time.

Priority Actions

- Support informed, shared decisions about prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screening.
- Ensure timely follow-up after an abnormal PSA result and access to specialists, biopsy, testing, and treatment.

Prostate Cancer Diagnosis Rate Over Time

Rate of new prostate cancer diagnoses among Alaska Native men, 1974-2023



Data Source: ANTR Analysis Database, Nov 2025 Sub
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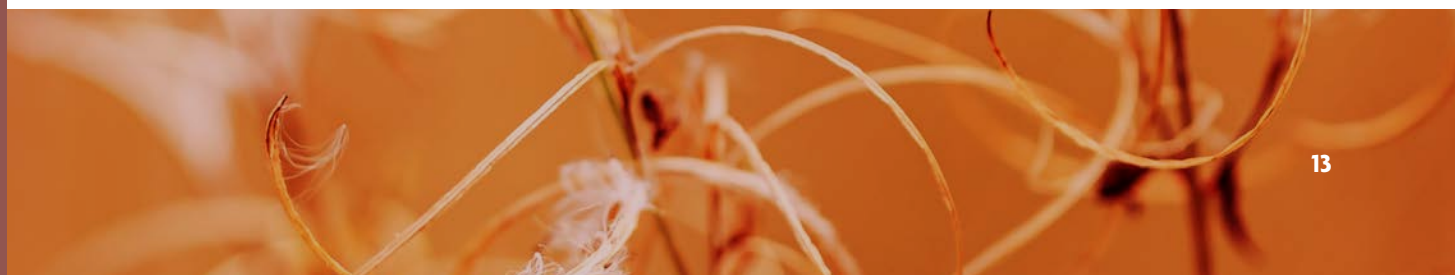


Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is largely preventable, but early detection is important.

32
NEW DIAGNOSES
2019–2023

15
DIAGNOSED AT LOCALIZED STAGE

14
DIAGNOSED AT REGIONAL STAGE

Cervical Cancer Rates Over Time

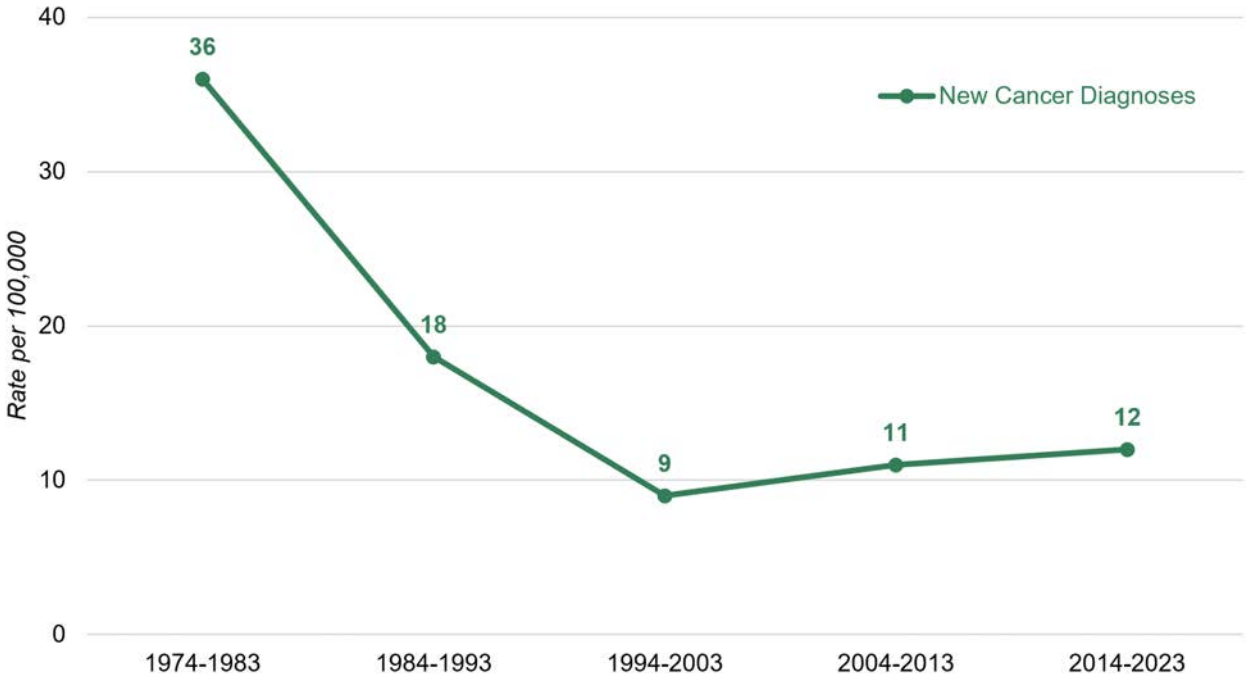
- The rate of new cervical cancer diagnoses fell sharply in the late eighties (from 36.5 in 1974-1983 to 9.1 in 1994-2003), but progress has slowed down since then.
- Since 2004 cervical cancer diagnosis rates remain substantially higher among Alaska Native women than among U.S. White women, reaching 12.4 in 2014-2023. In the most recent five years, the cervical cancer rate among Alaska Native women was 2.7 times the rate among U.S. White women.

Priority Actions

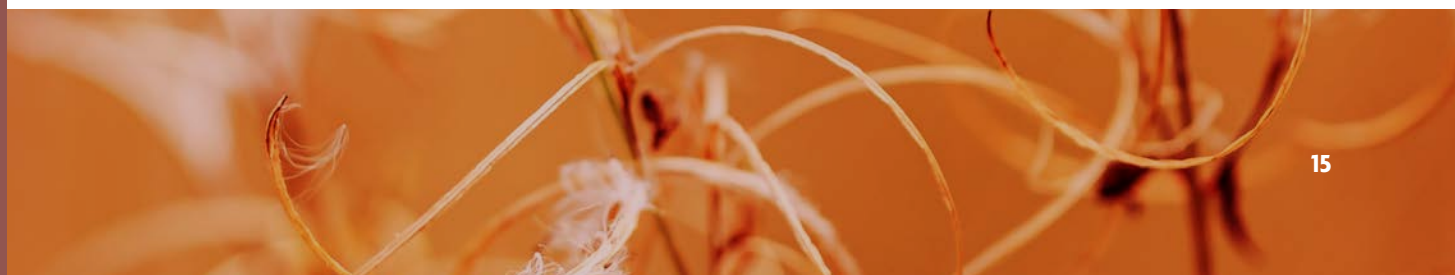
- Increase vaccination against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).
- Ensure access to cervical cancer screening and cancer diagnostics.
- Expand cervical cancer screening and HPV vaccination reminder systems.

New Cervical Cancer Cases Over Time

Rate of new cervical cancer diagnoses among Alaska Native women, 1974-2023



Data Source: ANTR Analysis Database, Nov 2025 Sub
Rates age-adjusted to the 2000 US Std Population (19 age groups - Census P25-1130) standard.



Cancer by Tribal Health Region

Cancer rates varied across the 12 Tribal Health Regions. These differences can help guide outreach, screening, and resources. Regional rates cover 2009-2023 and are adjusted for age. Regional cancer death rates are not included in this summary.

Top cancer sites among Alaska Native people by rate of new cancer diagnoses by Tribal Health Region, 2009-2023

Tribal Health Region	Cancer Site	Rate
Aleutians and Pribilofs	Lung	127
Anchorage/Mat-Su	Breast	102
Arctic Slope	Lung	144
Bristol Bay	Colorectal	100
Copper River/Prince William Sound	Breast	105
Interior	Breast	98
Kenai Peninsula	Lung	110
Kodiak Area	Prostate	80
Northwest Arctic	Colorectal	93
Norton Sound	Colorectal	112
Southeast	Breast	92
Yukon-Kuskokwim	Colorectal	106

Notes:
Breast cancer only includes diagnoses among women; prostate cancer only includes diagnoses among men.

Rates age-adjusted to the 2000 US Std Population (19 age groups - Census P25-1130) standard.
Data Source: ANTR ADB, 2025

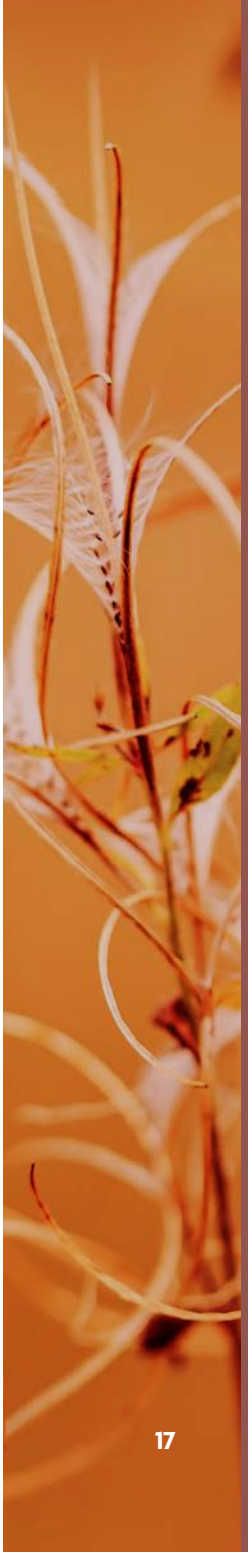
Turning Data Into Action

ANTR data are used to support regional cancer planning, provider education, research, program evaluation, and resource allocation. *Cancer in Alaska Native People: 55-Year Report* identifies patterns in cancer incidence, mortality, and stage at diagnosis that can help guide prevention, screening, and treatment efforts across Alaska. Alaska Native Tumor Registry data does more than describe cancer; it helps change cancer care.

In 2013, ANTR data showed that Alaska Native people had a high burden of colorectal cancer and were developing it at younger age. Those findings helped change Alaska Native Medical Center's recommendations to start screening for colorectal cancer at age of 40 years instead of 50 years, giving people a better chance to prevent cancer or find it early.

ANTR data also guide Tribal Health Organization priorities, regional cancer planning, provider education, research, and funding decisions. The 55-year report identifies Tribal Health Regions where cancer burdens are highest and where prevention, screening, early detection, and access to care can be improved.

The data presented here and in the 55-year Report are not simply numbers; they are information that can lead to better policies, better care, and saved lives.



Recommendations Based on Findings

- **Increase tobacco screening and cessation support** by expanding routine screening and referrals to counseling, quit programs, and evidence-based medications.
- **Expand access to lung cancer screening** for eligible adults to support earlier detection and improve treatment outcomes.
- **Increase access to cancer genetic testing, risk assessment, and genetic counseling** to help identify individuals at elevated risk and guide prevention and early detection strategies.
- **Improve HPV vaccination coverage** among eligible children, adolescents, and adults. HPV vaccination is a proven cancer prevention strategy that protects against several cancers, including cervical, throat, anal, penile, vaginal, and vulvar cancers.
- **Strengthen patient navigation and behavioral health services** across the cancer care continuum, from diagnosis and treatment through survivorship and supportive care.
- **Promote HPV vaccination for adults through age 45, when appropriate**, by increasing awareness and encouraging discussions between patients and providers about individual risk factors and potential benefits of vaccination.

ALASKA NATIVE
TRIBAL HEALTH
CONSORTIUM

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The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

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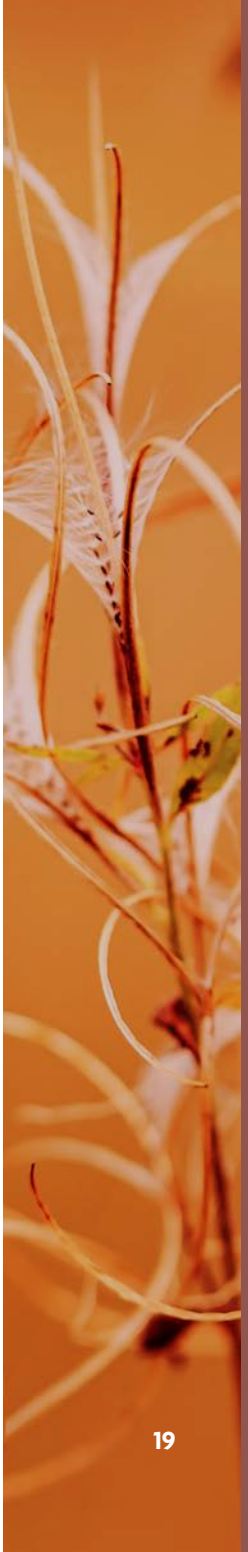

ALASKA NATIVE
TRIBAL HEALTH
CONSORTIUM

Resources

Full 55-Year Report
epi.anthc.org/reports