Jreissati Pancreatic Centre

Epworth

Caring for a loved one

with pancreatic cancer

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Acknowledgements

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The Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country across Australia. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, communities and culture.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Note to readers

This booklet provides general information about pancreatic cancer. It is not intended to replace advice from your treating team or other qualified professionals. You should always speak with your doctor about decisions that may affect your health. If you require legal, financial or psychological support, we encourage you to seek advice from appropriately trained specialists.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information is accurate at the time of publication. However, evidence and clinical guidance relating to cancer care are continually evolving. The Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth is not responsible for any loss, injury or damage resulting from reliance on this material.

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VICTORIAN CANCER AGENCY

VICTORIA State Government

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About the Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth

Pancreatic cancer is the eighth most diagnosed cancer in Australia. In 2025, it was estimated that 4,825 people would receive a pancreatic cancer diagnosis. This would account for 2.8% of all cancer diagnoses in the country.[1]

The Jreissati family are all too familiar with the fear and uncertainty that follow a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, having lived through the experience when Elias was diagnosed at age 54. Knowing the impact the disease has had on their family, Elias, his wife Colleen and the rest of the Jreissati family wanted to change the patient and family experience for others. This led to the establishment of the Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth in 2021. This Centre provides clinical care and support to patients with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, supports early diagnosis and better patient outcomes, advocates for patients and raises awareness and understanding of the disease. 100% of the funding it receives is directed into research, patient support and clinical care.

Our centre comprises three intersecting parts, each of which is integral to improving patient outcomes and experiences

- Comprehensive patient-centred clinical care
- Patient advocacy and support
- Clinical trials and research

We are a specialist centre offering a centralised model of care for pancreatic disease management. This means our patients have access to all healthcare professionals required for their care within a single centre and hospital network. International studies support the view that centralised care improves overall patient outcomes.[2] By managing patients through one main centre, case volume increases, which in turn enhances clinical expertise. This growing expertise drives innovation and leads to advances that will improve patient procedures and treatments in the future.

The **patient experience** is a central focus of our centre. Receiving a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer can be an overwhelming and emotional time, often bringing many questions and uncertainties. Knowing that you are not facing this alone, and understanding where to turn for support, is very important. Once you are referred to the centre, you will meet our pancreatic nurse coordinator, who will be there to guide and support you throughout your care at Epworth. They will be your first point of contact and are always available to answer any questions or concerns you or your family may have.

Caring for a loved one with pancreatic cancer

If someone close to you has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, you may find yourself in a caring role. Every caring role is different. This might involve helping with daily tasks, providing emotional support, or simply being present during treatment and recovery. You might be caring for a partner, parent, child, friend or relative.

This booklet has been developed to help you feel more informed and prepared. It includes practical advice, guidance on supporting your loved one, and suggestions for looking after your own wellbeing. You do not need to have all the answers. Being present, listening, and offering support can make a meaningful difference.

Watch our video on caring for a loved one with pancreatic cancer here.

Caring for a loved one during treatment and recovery

Caring for someone with pancreatic cancer can involve both emotional and practical support. Their needs will change over time, depending on the type of treatment, how they respond, and their overall health.

Most people will receive more than one type of treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Each has different side effects, and recovery can take time. Some days may feel manageable, while others may be more challenging.

You might help with:

- Preparing meals and managing medications
- Attending appointments, including helping with questions and notes
- Monitoring for symptoms or side effects
- Providing emotional support, especially during periods of uncertainty

Recovery from surgery or a treatment cycle often requires rest and adjustments to usual routines. On some days, your loved one may need more support; on others, they may prefer more independence. Try to check in regularly and ask what is most helpful.

Supporting a loved one through treatment or fatigue

Different stages of treatment bring different challenges. The support your loved one needs will depend on their situation and how they are feeling.

After surgery

Recovery from pancreatic surgery can take several weeks or months. Your loved one may spend time in hospital and need extra support at home. You can help by:

- Preparing soft, easy-to-digest meals
- Keeping track of medications and appointments
- Assisting with physical tasks (for example, lifting, driving, household chores)
- Noticing signs of complications, such as fever, pain or digestive symptoms

During chemotherapy or radiotherapy

These treatments can cause fatigue, nausea, appetite changes and increased risk of infection. You can support them by:

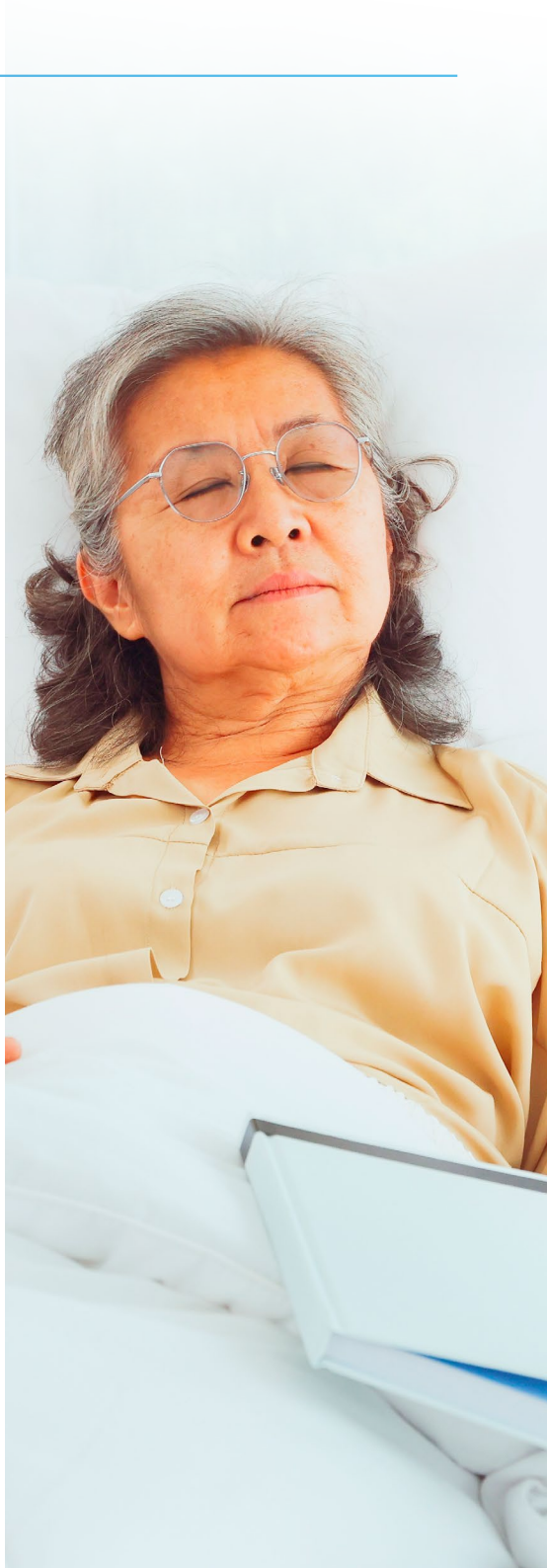
- Encouraging rest and managing routines around energy levels
- Making the home environment comfortable and calm
- Helping with transport, meals or paperwork
- Keeping a record of side effects to share with the care team
- Watching for signs of infection and seeking advice if needed

Managing fatigue

Fatigue is a common side effect of treatment. It may feel constant and may not improve with rest alone. You can help by:

- Supporting with daily tasks such as shopping or housework
- Encouraging light activity or fresh air, if recommended
- Respecting their need for rest without pressure to do more
- Helping structure the day around natural energy levels

Every person is different. Try to ask what kind of support they need, rather than assuming. What helps one day may not help the next.



Managing medications and appointments

Pancreatic cancer treatment often involves multiple medications and regular appointments with different health professionals. Keeping track of these can feel overwhelming, especially if the person you are caring for is tired or unwell. Many carers play an important role in helping manage this part of care.

Medications

Your loved one may be prescribed medicines to manage:

- Cancer treatment (such as chemotherapy or targeted therapy)
- Side effects (such as nausea, pain, or constipation)
- Digestion (such as pancreatic enzyme replacement)
- Other health conditions

You can support them by:

- Keeping a written list of medications, doses and times
- Using a pill organiser or setting phone reminders
- Watching for side effects and reporting concerns to the care team
- Making sure medications are stored safely and taken as prescribed

If you are unsure about a medication or how it works, ask the pharmacist or treating team for advice.

Appointments

There may be regular visits to oncologists, surgeons, GPs, nurses, dietitians or other specialists. It can help to:

- Use a calendar or phone app to track dates and times
- Keep a running list of questions or symptoms to raise
- Take notes during appointments if the person would like support
- Store important documents such as letters, test results or referrals in one place
- Check in with the care team if follow-up is needed

If you are not able to attend every appointment, ask if updates can be shared with you. In some cases, telehealth or phone consultations may be available.

Looking after your own health and mental wellbeing

Caring for someone with pancreatic cancer can be physically and emotionally demanding. It is common to feel tired, anxious or overwhelmed – especially if you are also managing work, family or other responsibilities.

Looking after your own wellbeing is not selfish. It helps you stay healthy enough to continue supporting your loved one and to manage any challenges that may arise.

Ways to support your own wellbeing

- Maintain some daily routines where possible, including regular meals, sleep and short breaks
- Accept offers of help from family, friends or services
- Make time for small activities that help you relax or recharge
- Talk to someone you trust about how you are coping
- Stay connected with others, even through brief messages or conversations
- Consider respite care if you need time to rest or attend to other responsibilities

Common challenges

You may experience:

- Guilt about taking time for yourself
- Worry about the future or what to expect
- Emotional distress from seeing someone you care about unwell

These feelings are understandable. Support is available, and you do not need to manage everything on your own. Many carers find it helpful to speak with a counsellor, connect with a carer support service, or join a peer group.

Your GP or the care team can help you access services that support carers. These may include emotional support, practical help at home, or short-term respite options.

What to do if you're worried about symptoms or changes

As a carer, you may be the first to notice if something changes. This could include new symptoms, a worsening of side effects, or shifts in mood, appetite or energy.

Some changes are expected during treatment. Others may need medical attention. If you are unsure, it is always appropriate to speak with the care team.

When to get in touch with the care team

Get in touch with the treating team or GP if you notice:

- A temperature over 38°C or flu-like symptoms. This may indicate infection and needs urgent review (go to the emergency department if needed)
- Sudden or worsening pain
- Difficulty eating, drinking, or keeping food down
- Confusion, excessive drowsiness, or significant changes in mood or behaviour
- Concerns about medication side effects or possible interactions
- Unexplained weight loss, swelling or bloating

Who to contact

- Your GP or hospital clinic
- A pancreatic nurse specialist or care coordinator
- The hospital's day oncology unit or after-hours advice line
- Emergency services (000) if the person is very unwell

Keep a brief record of symptoms, when they started, and how they have changed. This can help the care team make quicker and more accurate decisions.

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Key takeaways

Caring for someone with pancreatic cancer can involve many roles. This may include helping with meals or medicines, managing appointments, or supporting decisions about care.

Some key points to remember:

- Small actions such as keeping notes or attending appointments can make a difference
- Your own health and wellbeing are important to maintain
- Support is available to assist with practical, emotional and financial concerns
- Stay in contact with your care team or GP if your situation becomes more complex
- Planning ahead can help reduce stress and improve confidence in your role

If you need further support, speak with your GP, the treating team, or contact one of the services listed in this booklet.

Contact us

Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth

Phone 03 9426 8880
Email EH-PancreaticCentre@epworth.org.au

pancreaticcentre.org.au

Glossary

Advance care directive: A legal document that records a person's wishes about their future medical care if they cannot speak for themselves.

Carer: A person, often a family member or friend, who provides unpaid support to someone with a serious illness.

Chemotherapy: A treatment that uses medicines to kill cancer cells or slow their growth.

Fatigue: A feeling of constant tiredness or lack of energy that may not improve with rest. It is a common side effect of cancer and treatment.

GP (general practitioner): A community doctor who provides overall medical care, referrals, and ongoing support.

Medication management: Keeping track of prescribed medicines, doses and timing to make sure they are taken safely and correctly.

Multidisciplinary team: A group of health professionals from different specialties who work together to plan and deliver a person's care.

Nausea: A sick feeling in the stomach or the urge to vomit, often caused by treatment side effects.

Oncologist: A doctor who specialises in treating cancer, often using chemotherapy or other drug therapies.

Pancreatic nurse specialist / care coordinator: A nurse who helps patients and carers manage appointments, treatment side effects and support services.

Radiotherapy: A treatment that uses targeted radiation to destroy or shrink cancer cells.

Respite care: Short-term care provided to the person with cancer so their usual carer can have a break.

Side effects: Unwanted effects of treatment, such as nausea, fatigue, pain or appetite changes.

Symptom diary: A simple record of symptoms, when they occur and how they change, used to support discussions with the care team.

Wellbeing: A state of overall physical, emotional and social health. Looking after your own wellbeing helps you continue in your caring role.

Additional resources

General

Carer Gateway

Carer Gateway is a national service that supports carers with free counselling, practical advice, respite care and referrals to local services.

www.carergateway.gov.au

Cancer Council

Cancer Council provides information and booklets for carers, including tips on managing appointments, looking after your own health, and coping with the challenges of caring. Free, confidential support is also available through the 13 11 20 telephone line.

www.cancer.org.au

Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body for carers. Its website provides fact sheets, advice, and links to state and territory Carers Associations, which offer workshops, peer groups and counselling.

www.carersaustralia.com.au

Lifeline

Lifeline provides free, 24-hour crisis support and counselling by phone (13 11 14) or online chat. It is available to anyone experiencing emotional distress, including carers.

www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue

Beyond Blue offers 24/7 support through phone and online counselling for people experiencing anxiety, stress or depression. The website includes resources tailored to carers and families.

www.beyondblue.org.au

Financial and legal advice

Cancer Council's Financial Assistance Program

Provides advice and support on a variety of topics including legal issues, financial planning, small business accounting, workplace (HR or recruitment) advice.

13 11 20

cancer.org.au/support-and-services/practical-and-financial-assistance

Community Legal Centres Australia

Provides links to local community legal centres across Australia.

clcs.org.au/legal-help

Cancer Council's Dealing with Debt factsheet

Information for people who are having trouble paying their debts.

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/dealing-with-debts

Services Australia's Financial Information Service

Information on employment, disability, sickness and carer payments.

132 850

servicesaustralia.gov.au

Type 'Financial Information Service' in the search box

Cancer Council's Help with Bills factsheet

Explains options to help you pay your utility bills, including rebates, discounts, and concessions

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/help-with-bills-factsheet

Money Smart

Financial tips from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC). Includes the Financial Advisers Register.

1300 300 630

moneysmart.gov.au

State Trustees

Public Trustees who can help you prepare a will and manage your finances. Contains links to public trustees by state and territory.

willshub.com.au/succession-law-resources/public-trustees/

Cancer Council's Superannuation and Cancer factsheet

Advice on finding and accessing super, tax implications of accessing super, and super-related insurance.

cancercouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Superannuation-and-Cancer.pdf

Counselling and mentoring services

Canteen

Free counselling and emotional support to young people and their families who are impacted by cancer.

1800 226 833

canteen.org.au

Care Search

Australian Government website that provides palliative care information and links to services for people affected by cancer.

caresearch.com.au

Kids Helpline

Telephone and online counselling service and crisis support for young people aged 5–25.

1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au

Pancare support groups

Online and face-to-face support groups for patients and carers.

1300 881 698

pancare.org.au/living-well/support-groups/upper-gastrointestinal-cancer-support-groups

Pankind Support Navigator

(02) 7207 6970

support@pankind.org.au

Telephone support groups

The below telephone support groups are free, professionally facilitated support groups. They are open groups and you can join in whenever you feel well enough, on an ongoing basis, from anywhere in Australia.

Members are telephoned by Cancer Council so there are no costs to participate. You can be called on a landline or a mobile.

The Pancreatic Telephone Support Group meets the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 1.30pm–2.30pm (EST) and accepts new members at any time.

The Advanced Cancer Telephone Support Group meets the first and third Tuesday of the month from 1.30pm–2.30pm (EST) and is for people with a variety of cancers, including pancreatic cancer.

The Carers' Telephone Support Group meets the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month from 1.30pm–2.30pm (EST) and is for people caring for someone with any cancer, including pancreatic cancer.

To find out more about any of these telephone support groups, 1300 755 632 or email tsg@nswcc.org.au.

Medicare Safety Nets thresholds

Medicare Safety Nets have thresholds. When you spend certain amounts in gap and out-of-pocket costs, you may reach these thresholds. Once you've reached the thresholds, you'll begin to receive higher Medicare benefits. This means you'll receive more money back for certain Medicare-funded services.

servicesaustralia.gov.au/what-are-medicare-safety-nets-thresholds

Please make sure you register so that your payments are counted towards the threshold.

Information for carers

Carer Gateway

Links carers to local support services such as emergency respite care, counselling and peer support groups. Offers practical information, resources and support packages for carers.

1800 422 737

carergateway.gov.au

Carers Australia

National body working with state and territory Carers Associations to provide information and counselling for carers.

1800 242 636

carersaustralia.com.au

Advance care planning

Advance Care Planning Australia

Information about planning for your future healthcare, including advance care directives.

1300 208 582

advancecareplanning.org.au

My Values

A set of specially constructed statements designed to help you identify, consider and communicate your wishes about the medical treatment you would want in the later stages of life.

myvalues.org.au

Helpful guides and factsheets

Cancer Council's Employment and Cancer factsheet

This fact sheet answers some common question people have about their rights. It explains federal employment laws and protections under anti-discrimination laws.

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/employment-and-cancer

Cancer Council's Getting your Affairs in Order factsheet

Instructions on making a will, preparing documents that will help others to make decisions for you if you're not able to make them yourself, nominating a beneficiary for your superannuation and insurance, and sorting out legal and financial paperwork.

cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/getting-your-affairs-in-order-factsheet

My Aged Care

Established by the Australian Government to help you find and access the right government-funded aged care services.

You can call the My Aged Care Contact Centre on 1800 200 422.

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturdays 10am to 2pm

myagedcare.gov.au

Notes

Notes

References

1. Cancer Australia, *Pancreatic cancer in Australia statistics*, Cancer Australia, 2025, accessed 1 December 2025.
2. OO Faluyi, JL Connor, M Chatterjee, C Ikin, H Wong and DH Palmer, 'Advanced pancreatic adenocarcinoma outcomes with transition from devolved to centralised care in a regional Cancer Centre', British Journal of Cancer, 2017, 116:424-431.

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Contact us

Jreissati Pancreatic Centre at Epworth

Phone 03 9426 8880
Email EH-PancreaticCentre@epworth.org.au

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CONSUMER REVIEWED

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