GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

United Kingdom briefing:
Symptom awareness, attitudes to lung cancer and views on screening
Findings from a global survey

Overview

The Global Lung Cancer Coalition (GLCC) is a partnership of 44 patient organisations across 32 nations / territories, working to improve lung cancer awareness, reduce stigma and improve outcomes.

The GLCC Patient Charter asserts that all people with lung cancer have the right to dignity, respect, quality care, informed decision making, privacy and freedom from blame and stigma.

Public perceptions can significantly affect these rights. Stigma and low symptom awareness may delay help-seeking and diagnosis, making it important to understand attitudes towards lung cancer.

In 2026, the GLCC conducted a global study to explore public attitudes to lung cancer, awareness of symptoms and views on screening. The research builds on studies undertaken in 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2023.

The GLCC is calling on governments and health systems across the world to:

- Increase recognition of lung cancer symptoms through targeted public awareness campaigns
- Challenge stigma and misconceptions through evidence-based awareness initiatives
- Implement national lung cancer screening programmes to support earlier detection and treatment
- Ensure equitable access to screening, diagnosis and care for all people affected by lung cancer

This briefing sets out the key findings from the UK in 2026 and how they compare with other countries included in the survey. The results highlight three key themes:

- **Awareness of lung cancer symptoms** is relatively high, with the UK ranking among the countries with the strongest levels of symptom recognition.
- **Levels of stigma** towards people with lung cancer remain significant, with more than a third of respondents reporting less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other types of cancer.
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** remains strong, reflecting continued backing for efforts to improve earlier diagnosis through the UK's national screening programme.

Key findings: United Kingdom (2026)

Symptom recognition

- Around a **quarter** of people responding to the survey (**26.2%**) could not name any symptoms of lung cancer. While this places the UK among the better-performing countries surveyed, a substantial proportion of the public still lacks awareness of potential warning signs.
- Men were more likely than women to report not knowing any symptoms (**29.1% vs. 24.4%**).
- Lack of symptom awareness was highest among **18–24 year-olds** (**37.5%**), up from **28.2%** in **2023**.
- People who had never smoked were more likely than people who currently smoke or have smoked in the past to report not knowing any symptoms (**27.7% vs. 24.6%**).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- Nearly **four in ten** people (**37.8%**) agreed they had less sympathy for people with lung cancer than other cancers, broadly unchanged from **37.2%** in **2023**. Although lower than the **global average** (**39.2%**), this suggests stigma surrounding lung cancer remains a challenge in the UK.
- Men were more likely than women to hold this view (**45.3% vs. 33.2%**).
- People **aged 55 and over** were least likely to agree with the statement (**30.1%**), compared with **45.2%** of those **aged 25-34**.
- People who currently smoke or have smoked in the past were slightly more sympathetic than people who have never smoked (**36.9% vs. 38.8%** agreeing they had less sympathy).

Views on lung cancer screening

- More than **eight in ten** people **(83.6%)** supported a national lung cancer screening programme. Although slightly lower than in **2023** (**86.6%**), public support remains overwhelmingly strong.
- Women were more supportive than men (**84.6% vs. 81.9%**).
- Support increased with age, from **80.8%** among **18–24 year-olds** to **84.9%** among those **aged 25-34**.
- People who currently smoke or have smoked in the past were more supportive than people who have never smoked (**85.3% vs. 81.8%**).

Methodology

The GLCC commissioned the market research agency Censuswide to undertake an online survey of adults across 32 countries between 17 March 2026 – 24 March 2026. The survey samples included 1,000 adults from the UK and data was weighted using age, gender and region to produce a representative sample in each country. Respondents were asked the following questions:

- Q1. There are many warning signs and symptoms of lung cancer. Please list as many symptoms of lung cancer as you can think of [a tick box was provided for 'Don't know'].
- Q2. Lung cancer is mainly caused by smoking cigarettes and other tobacco products. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer.
- Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: There should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early.

Further analysis

Symptom recognition

Raising awareness of lung cancer symptoms is vital, as earlier diagnosis improves treatment outcomes.

In 2026, 26.2% of people in the UK said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, underlining the continued need for public awareness campaigns. Among those who could identify symptoms, responses were concentrated around the most common warning signs, particularly persistent coughs, coughing up blood and shortness of breath. Awareness of other recognised symptoms, including recurrent chest infections, persistent tiredness and loss of appetite, appeared to be substantially lower, suggesting public understanding remains focused on the most prominent respiratory symptoms of lung cancer.

The UK continues to compare favourably with many other countries in the survey, ranking among those with the lowest proportion of people unable to identify any symptoms. However, awareness

remains far from universal, highlighting opportunities to further improve public understanding of lung cancer symptoms.

Chart 1. Percentage of respondents who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by country

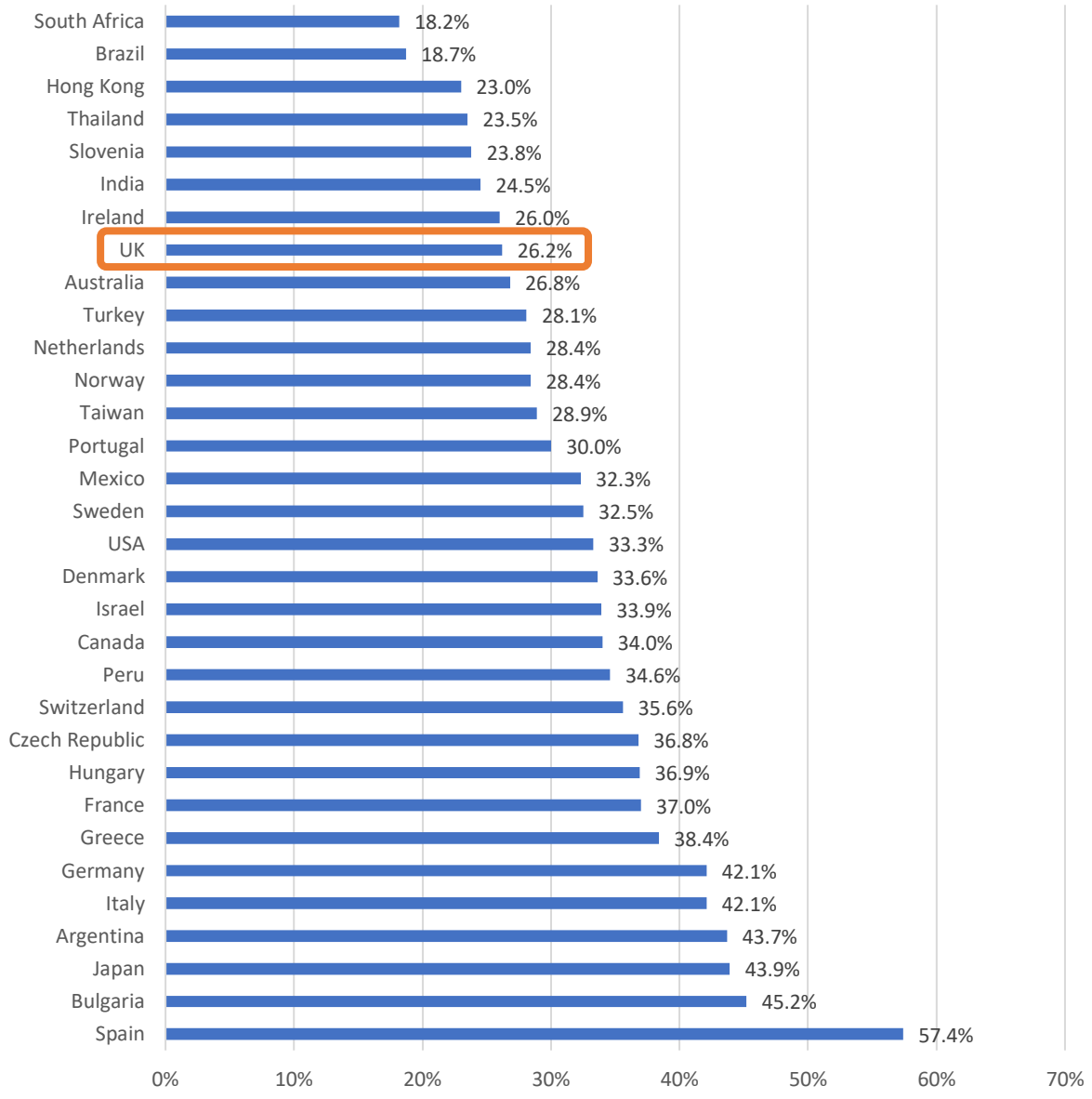


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

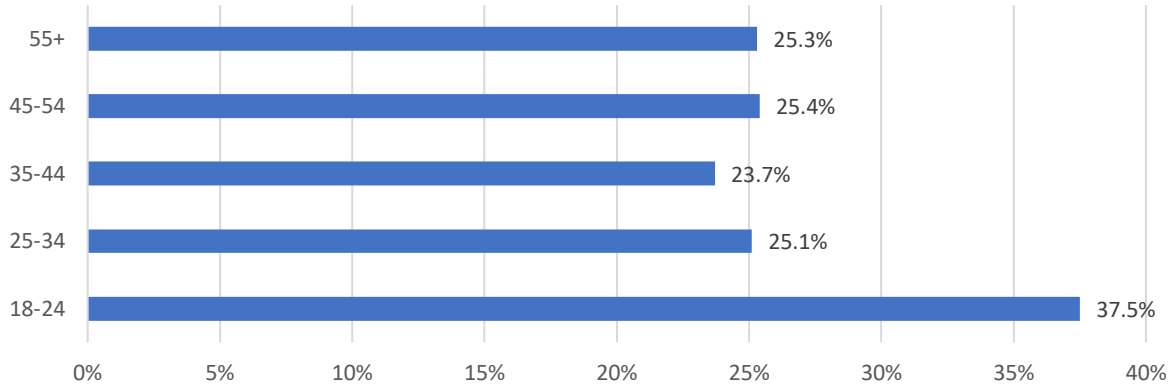
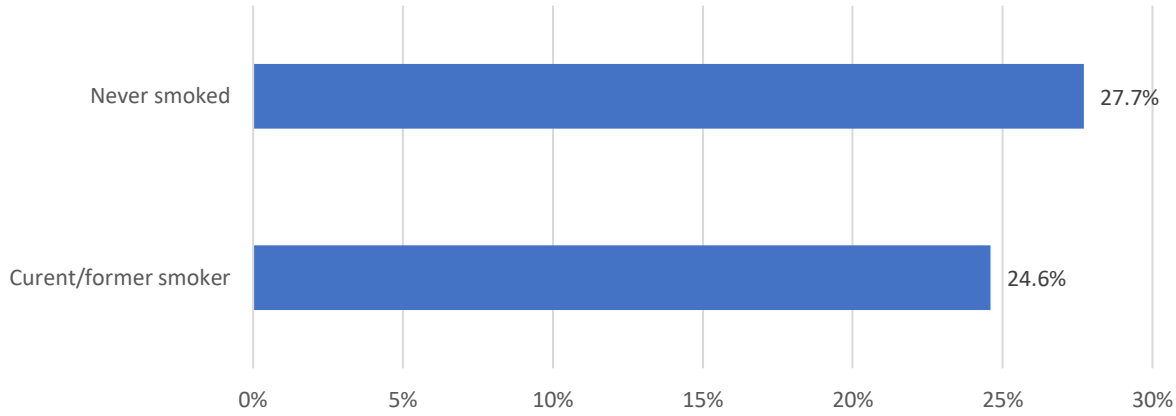


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by smoking status



Attitudes towards lung cancer

Around 60-70% of lung cancer cases are linked to smoking, which can contribute to stigma and blame associated with the disease.[1] This is concerning because lung cancer can affect people regardless of smoking history, while stigma and misconceptions may discourage some individuals from seeking medical advice when symptoms first appear. The GLCC believes that everyone living with lung cancer deserves access to high-quality treatment and care, regardless of the cause of their cancer.

In the United Kingdom, 37.8% of respondents agreed with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, broadly unchanged from 37.2% in 2023. While this is slightly lower than the global average (39.2%), it still represents a substantial proportion of the population and highlights the persistence of stigma surrounding lung cancer.

[1] World Health Organization (2026) *Lung cancer*. Available at: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lung-cancer (Accessed: 11 August 2026)

Chart 4. Percentage of respondents who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by country

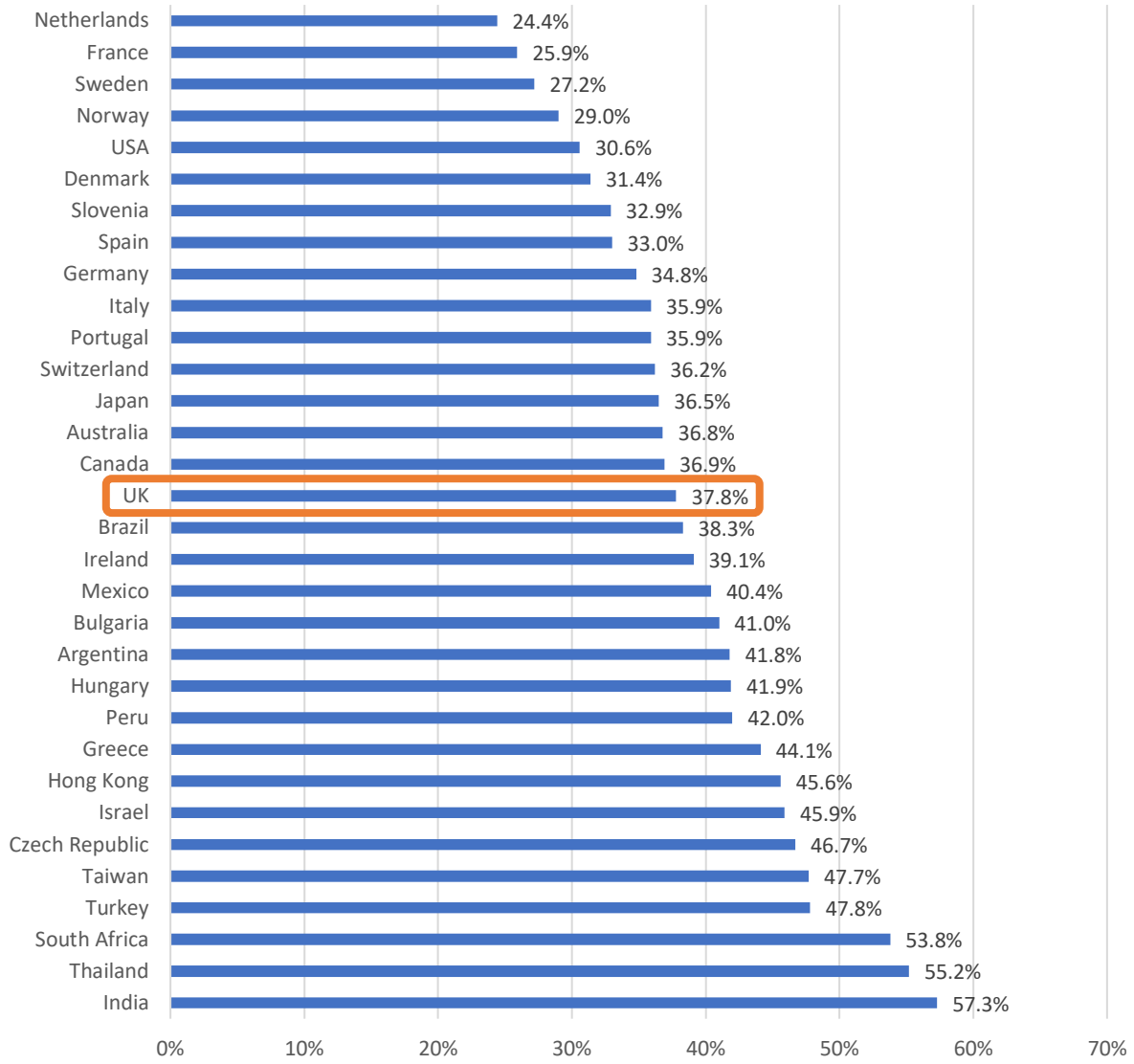


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

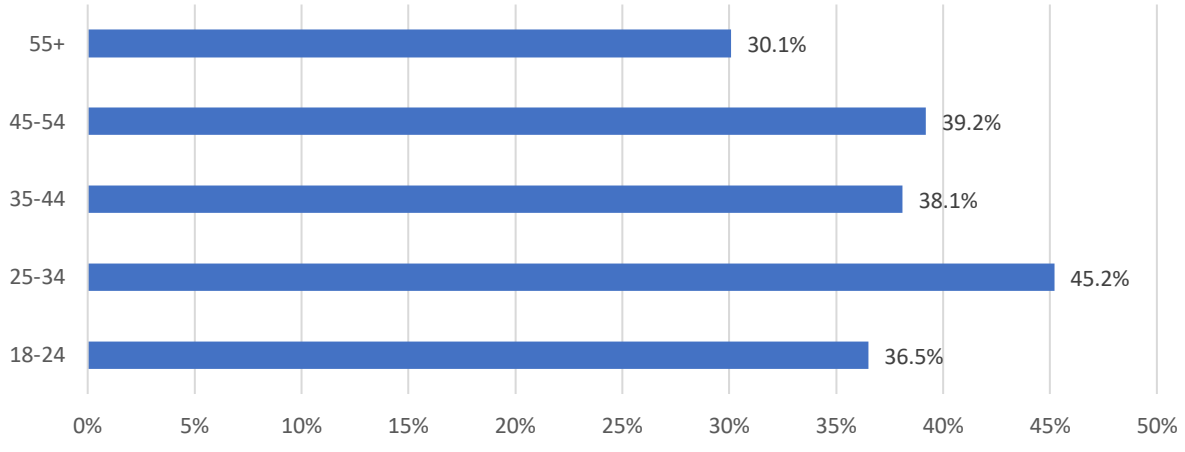
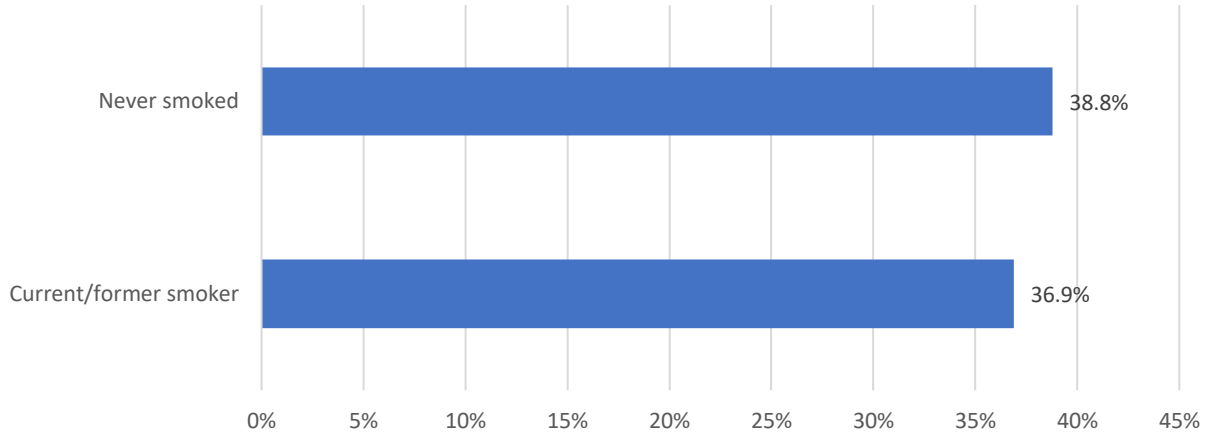


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



Views on lung cancer screening

A national lung cancer screening programme is a key measure to reduce the substantial burden that lung cancer places on individuals, families and healthcare systems. Lung cancer screening using low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) can save lives by detecting the disease at an earlier, more treatable stage. A large clinical trial found that LDCT screening reduced lung cancer mortality by 24% in men and 33% in women after 10 years of follow-up compared with no screening.[2]

Support for lung cancer screening remains very strong in the UK, with 83.6% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early. Although this represents a slight decrease from 86.6% in 2023, public support remains overwhelmingly high, with more than four in five people backing screening.

The UK is one of the relatively few countries to have implemented a national lung cancer screening programme. The continued high level of public support for screening demonstrates strong public backing for efforts to improve early diagnosis. These findings reinforce the importance of ensuring eligible people take up screening when invited, so that more lung cancers can be detected at an earlier stage when treatment is most effective.

[2] de Koning, H.J., van der Aalst, C.M., de Jong, P.A. *et al.* (2020) 'Reduced Lung-Cancer Mortality with Volume CT Screening in a Randomized Trial', *New England Journal of Medicine*, 382(6), pp. 503-513. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa1911793

Chart 7. Percentage of respondents who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by country

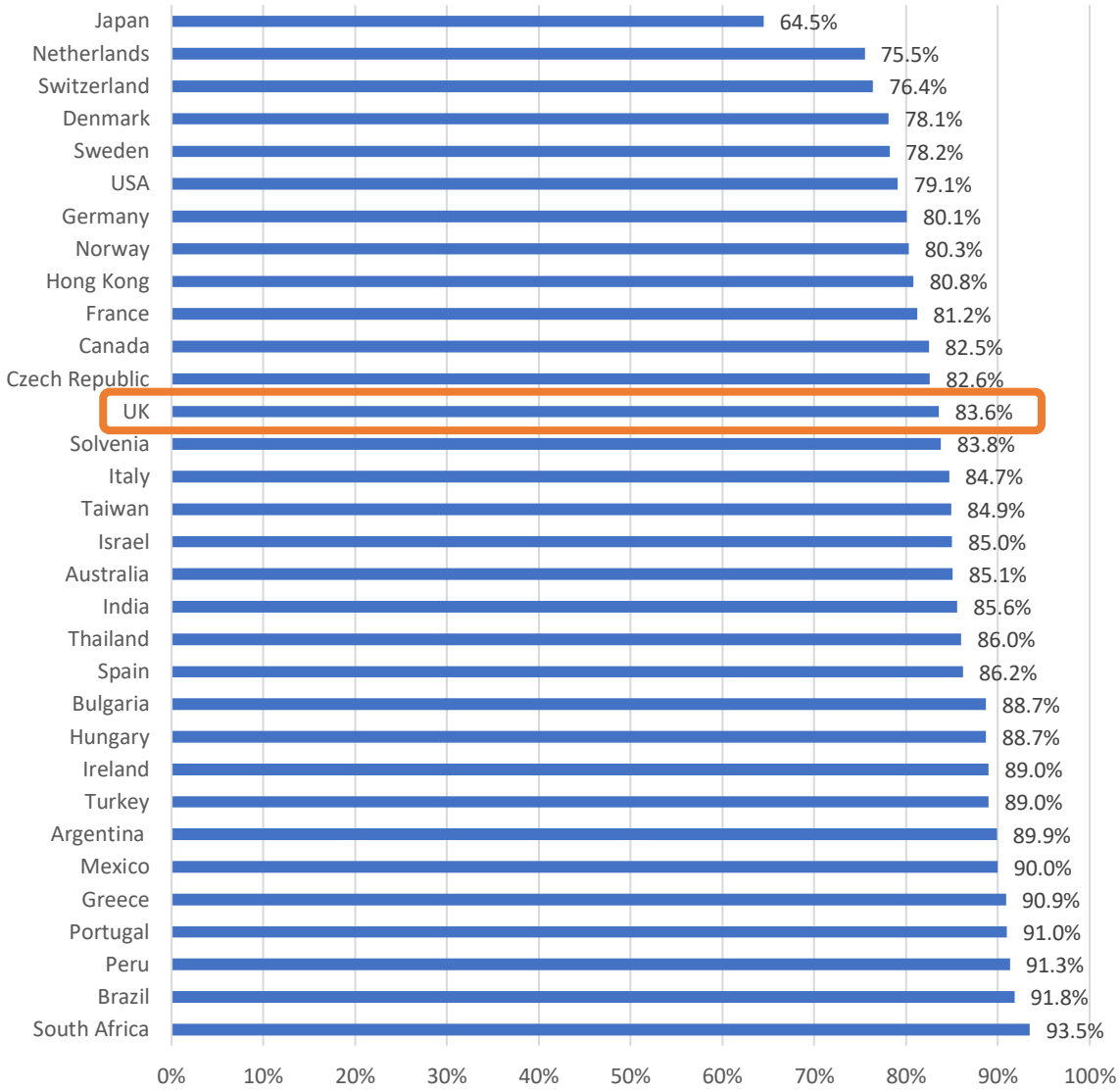


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

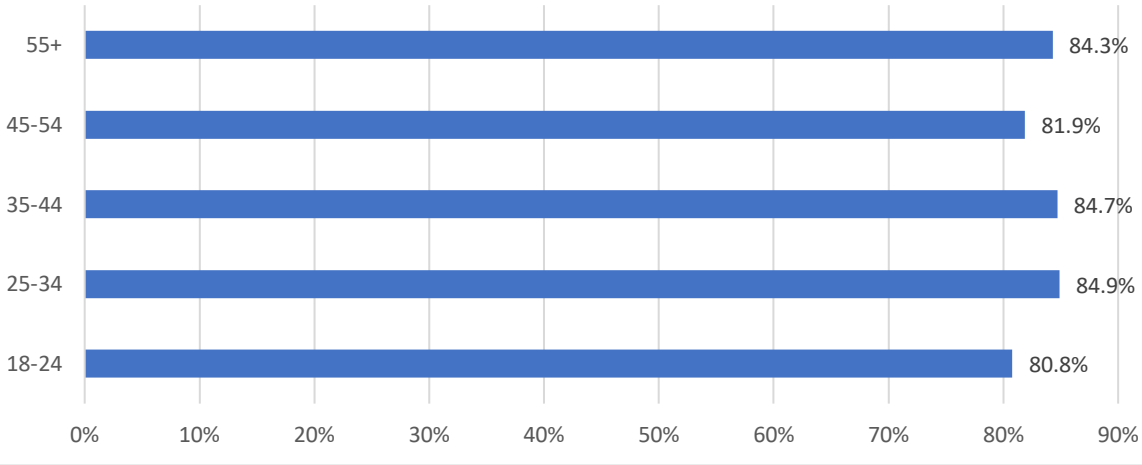
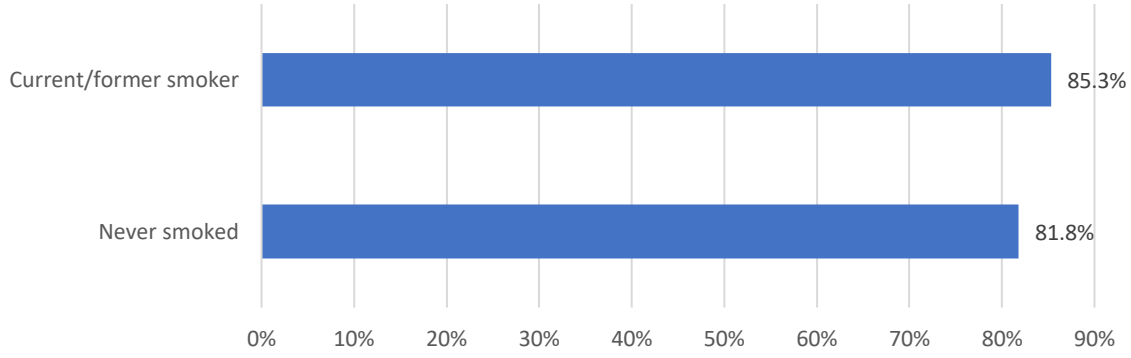


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The 2026 findings show that, while the UK continues to perform relatively well on symptom awareness and public support for screening remains strong, important challenges remain. Awareness of lung cancer symptoms remains relatively high compared with many other countries, but more than a quarter of people still cannot identify a single symptom. At the same time, stigma surrounding lung cancer remains persistent, with nearly four in ten people reporting less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other cancers.

Public support for lung cancer screening remains very strong, despite a slight decline since 2023, reinforcing the importance of efforts to maximise participation in the UK's national screening programme.

These findings highlight the need for continued investment in public awareness, action to challenge stigma and misconceptions, and ongoing efforts to ensure eligible people can access screening and benefit from earlier diagnosis. The GLCC will use these findings to support advocacy and awareness activities aimed at improving outcomes for everyone affected by lung cancer in the UK.

More information

Established in 2001, the GLCC comprises 44 non-government patient organisations from 32 nations / territories: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, UK and USA.

The GLCC promotes global understanding of lung cancer and the right of patients to effective early detection, better treatment and supportive care. By serving as the international voice of lung cancer patients, the GLCC is committed to improving disease outcomes for all.

For more information about this study and the work of the GLCC please visit: www.lungcancercoalition.org or email our secretariat at: glcc@roycastle.org.