GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

Australia 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.

This briefing sets out the key findings from Australia 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 strong by international standards, with Australia ranking among the countries with the highest levels of symptom recognition.
- **Levels of stigma** towards people with lung cancer remain below the global average and lower than in many countries surveyed.
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** is strong, with Australia ranking among the leading countries supporting earlier diagnosis through screening. Australia has now introduced a National Lung Cancer Screening Program, providing an important opportunity to improve earlier diagnosis and outcomes.

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

Key findings: Australia (2026)

Symptom recognition

- Around **one in four** people responding to the survey (**26.8%**) could not name any symptoms of lung cancer, placing Australia among the countries with the highest levels of symptom awareness in the survey. However there has been little change since **2023** when **26.7%** could not identify any symptoms.
- Men were slightly more likely than women to report not knowing any symptoms (**28.5% vs 25.9%**).
- Lack of symptom awareness was highest among people **aged 18-24** (**35.4%**).
- People who had never smoked were more likely to report not knowing any symptoms than current or former smokers (**28.5% vs 25.1%**).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- More than a **third** of respondents (**36.8%**) agreed that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer. This is lower than the **global average** (**39.2%**) and broadly unchanged from **2023** (**36.6%**).

- Men were more likely than women to report having less sympathy for people with lung cancer (**42.7% vs 33.8%**).
- Agreement was highest among those **aged 25-34** (**43.1%**), and lowest among those **aged 18-24** (**32.3%**).
- Current and former smokers were less likely than people who had never smoked to report having less sympathy for people with lung cancer (**30.7% vs 44.6%**).

Views on lung cancer screening

- More than **eight in ten** people (**85.1%**) supported a national lung cancer screening programme. While slightly lower than in **2023** (**87.9%**), support remains consistently high, with Australia among the countries showing strong support for screening.
- Support was similarly high among both women and men (**85.7%** and **84%** respectively).
- High levels of support were consistent across all age groups.
- People who currently smoke or have smoked were slightly more likely than people who had never smoked to support a national screening programme (**87.5% vs 82.6%**).

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 1,012 adults from Australia 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 recognising potential symptoms and seeking medical advice can support earlier diagnosis and better outcomes.

In 2026, 26.8% of people in Australia said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer. This was below the global average and among the lowest proportions recorded across the 32 countries included in the survey, although it was virtually unchanged from 2023 (26.7%).

Among those who could identify symptoms, awareness was concentrated around a small number of well-recognised warning signs, particularly persistent cough, shortness of breath, coughing up blood and chest pain. Awareness of other symptoms was much lower, with relatively few respondents identifying hoarseness, loss of appetite, recurrent chest infections or difficulty swallowing. Other recognised symptoms, including swelling of the face or neck and finger clubbing, were rarely identified.

These findings suggest that, while awareness of the most common lung cancer symptoms compares favourably with many of the countries surveyed, important gaps remain. Increasing awareness of the

broader range of lung cancer symptoms could help more people recognise when something may be wrong and seek medical advice sooner.

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

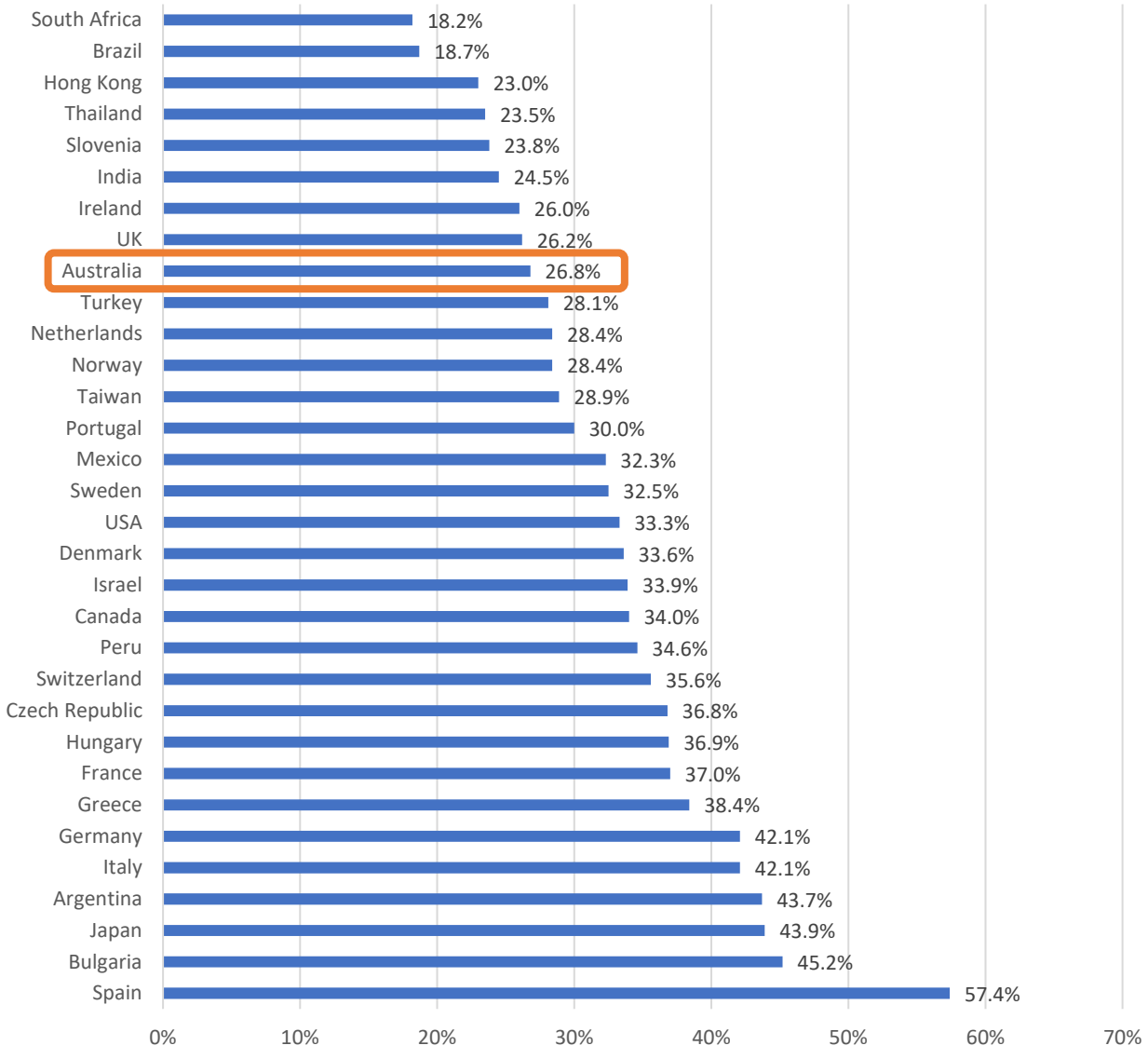


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in Australia who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

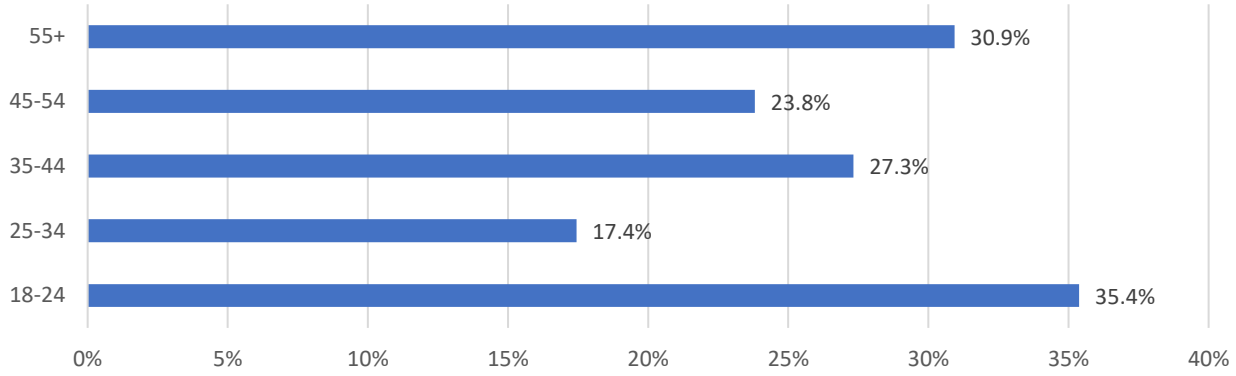
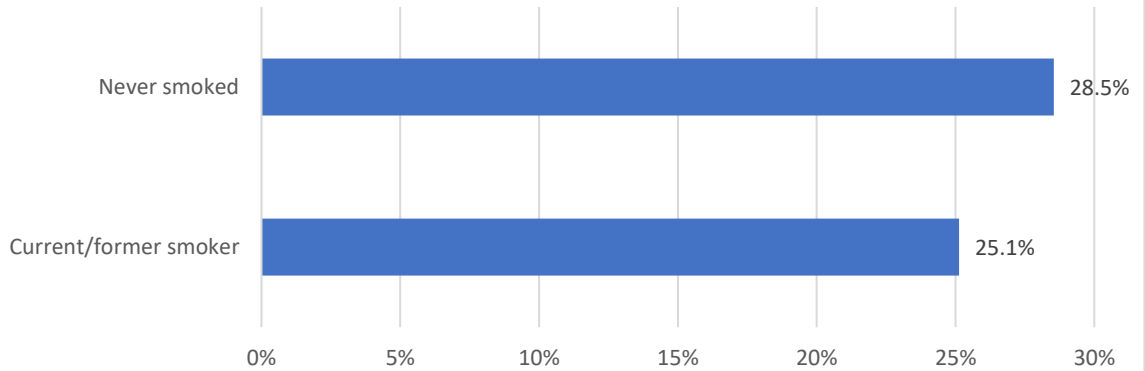


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in Australia who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by smoking status



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 Australia, 36.8% of respondents agreed with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer. This is below the global average of 39.2% and places Australia in the lower half of countries surveyed for this measure for levels of stigma towards people with lung cancer. However, the proportion was virtually unchanged from 2023 (36.6%) suggesting that little progress has been made in shifting attitudes.

While attitudes in Australia compare with many of the countries surveyed, more than a third of respondents still expressed lower levels of sympathy, highlighting the continued need to challenge misconceptions and reduce blame associated with 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

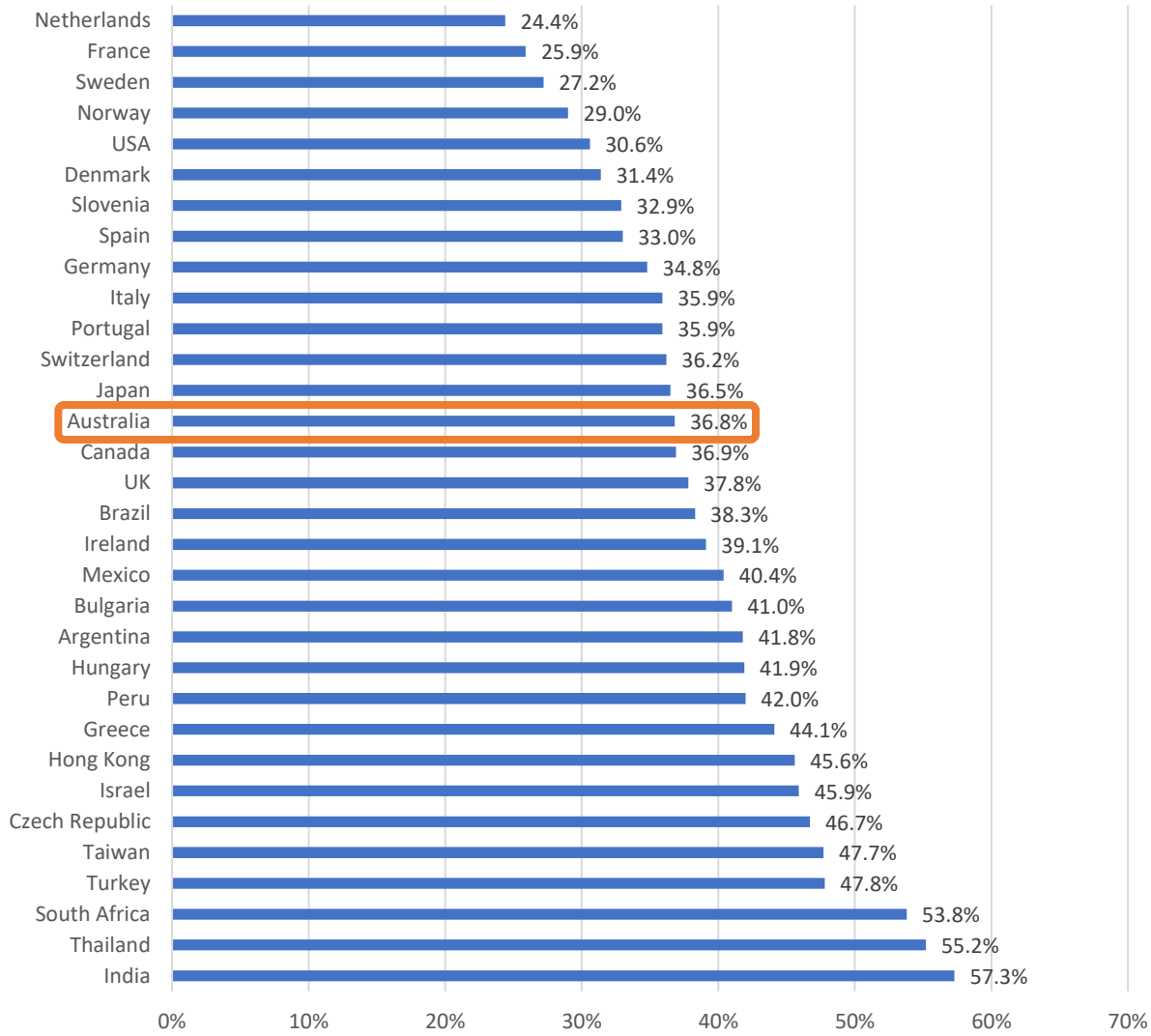


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in Australia who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

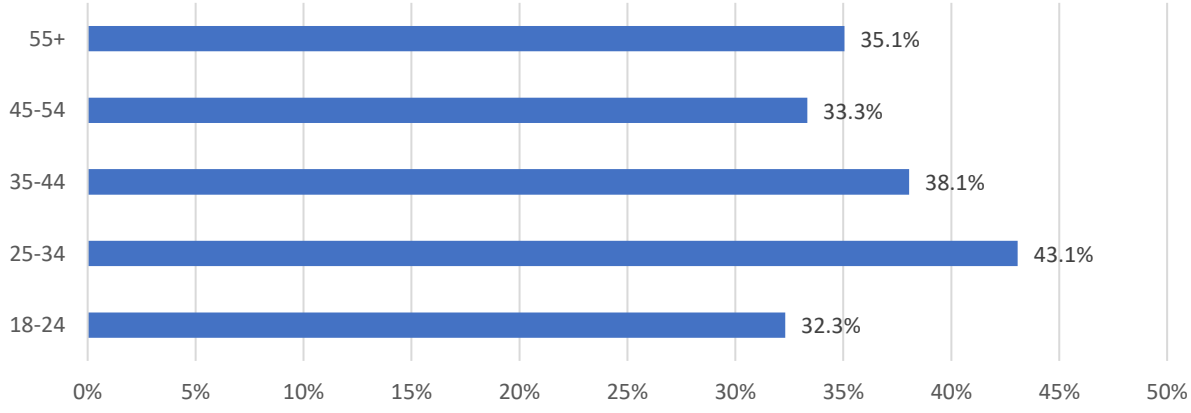
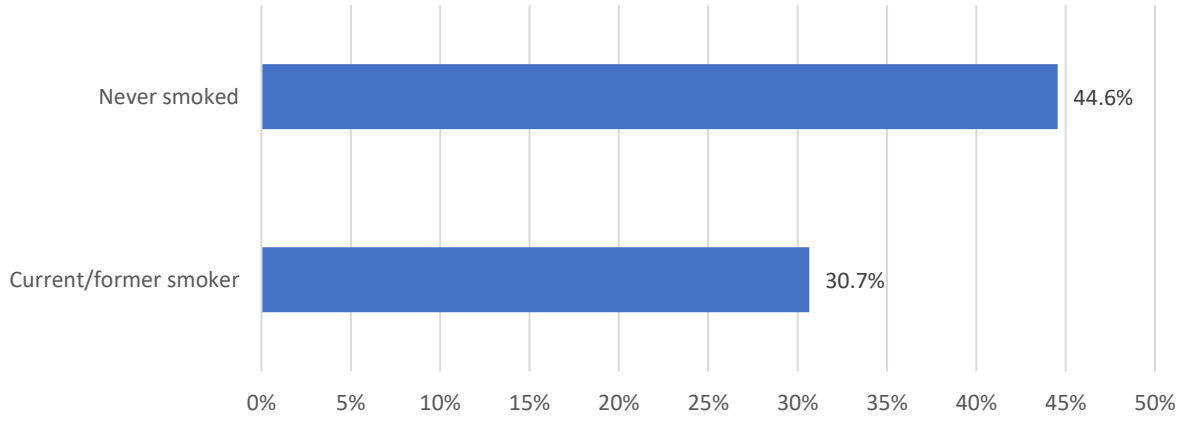


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in Australia who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



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]

Public support for lung cancer screening remains high in Australia. In 2026 85.1% of respondents agreed that there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed earlier. While slightly lower than the 87.9% recorded in 2023, support remains consistently high.

Since the previous GLCC study, Australia has introduced a National Lung Cancer Screening Program, representing an important step towards improving earlier detection of lung cancer.[3] The sustained high level of public support identified in this survey suggests strong public backing for screening. As the programme is implemented, raising awareness and supporting access among eligible people will be important to help realise its potential to detect more lung cancers earlier. when treatment is more likely to be 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

[3] Lung Cancer Foundation Australia. National Lung Cancer Screening Program. Available at: https://lungfoundation.com.au/lung-diseases/national-lung-cancer-screening-program/

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

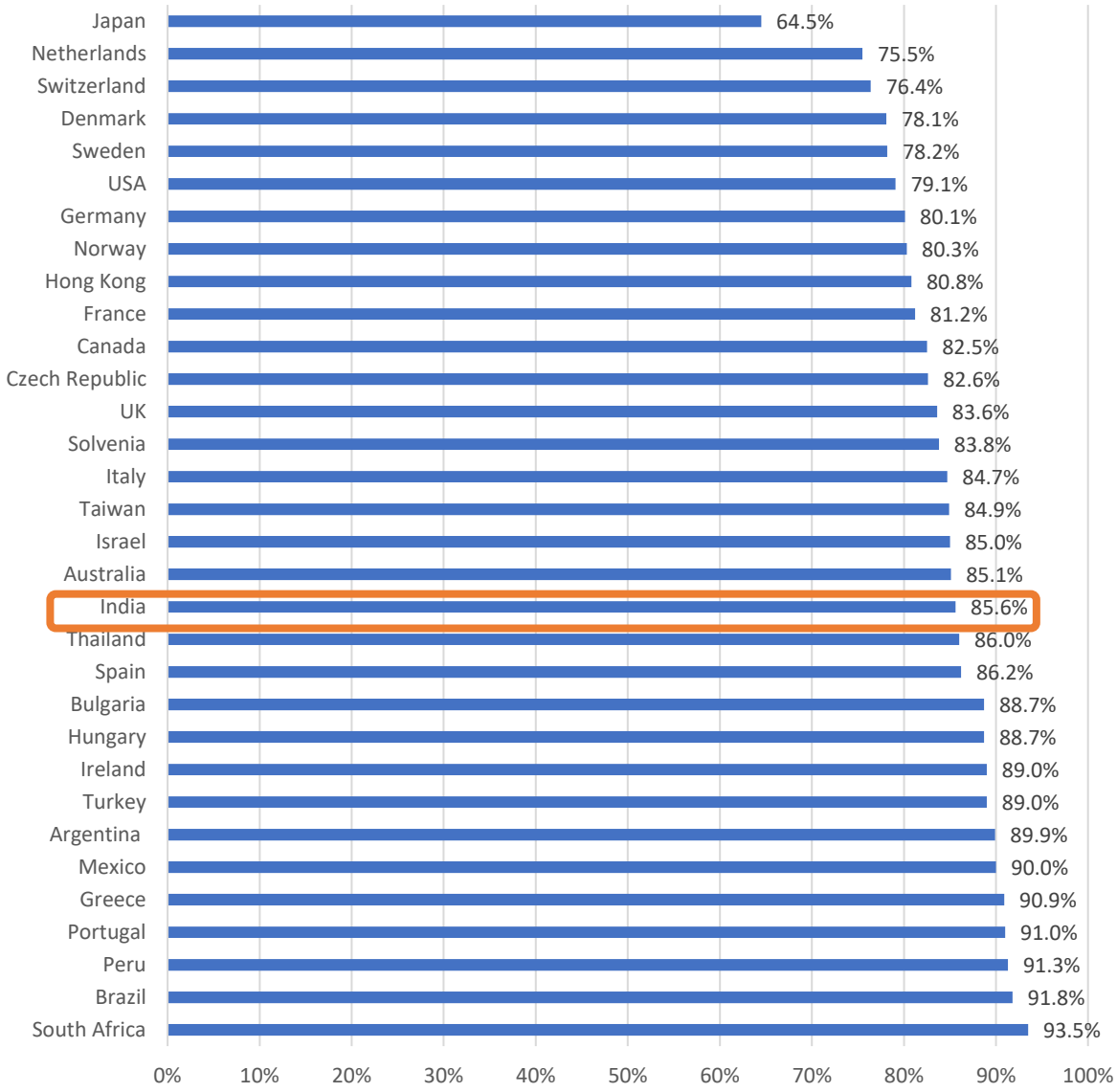


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in Australia who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

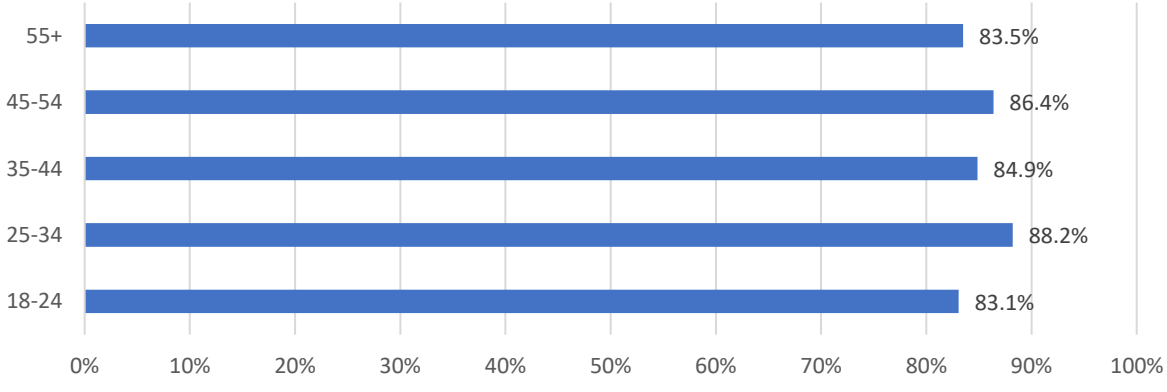
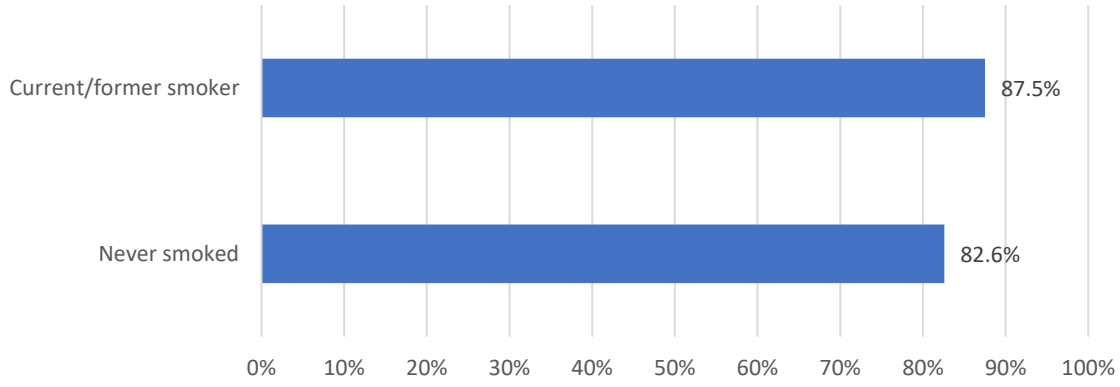


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in Australia who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The 2026 findings suggest that Australia performs relatively well on lung cancer symptom awareness compared with many countries included in the survey, while levels of stigma are lower than the global average. Public support for lung cancer screening is also strong, with more than eight in ten people backing the introduction of a national programme.

These findings highlight the opportunity to build on existing awareness, continue efforts to tackle stigma and misconceptions, and maximise the impact of Australia's National Lung Cancer Screening Program.

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.