GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

Canada 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 Canada 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 compared with many other countries included in the survey, although one in three people remain unable to identify any symptoms of lung cancer.
- While **levels of stigma** towards people with lung cancer are slightly below the global average, more than one-third of respondents reported having less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other types of cancer, demonstrating that stigma remains a significant challenge.
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** remains strong, with more than four in five respondents supporting a national screening programme. This reflects continued backing for efforts to expand access to organised screening programmes and pilots already operating across several Canadian provinces.

Key findings: Canada

Symptom recognition

- More than **one in three** people (**34%**) responding to the survey said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, slightly higher than in in **2023** (**32.9%**).
- Men were more likely than women to report not knowing any symptoms (**37.2% vs. 31.7%**).
- Lack of symptom awareness was highest among **18-24 year olds** (**43.7%**), compared with around **one-third** of **older age groups**.
- People who had never smoked were more likely than current or former smokers to report not knowing any symptoms (**35.9% vs. 32.5%**).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- More than **one in three** people (**36.9%**) agreed that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer. This was below the **global average** (**39.2%**) but slightly higher than in **2023** (**35.7%**).
- Men were more likely than women to report having less sympathy for people with lung cancer (**40.3% vs. 34.4%**).
- Younger people were more likely to express less sympathy, with agreement highest among people **aged 25-34** (**42.6%**) and **18-24** (**42.5%**). Those **aged 55 and over** were the least likely to agree with the statement (**32.0%**).
- People who had never smoked were slightly more likely than current or former smokers to express less sympathy towards people with lung cancer than those who currently smoke or had smoked previously (**38.5% vs. 36.0%**).

Views on lung cancer screening

- More than **eight in ten** people (**82.5%**) supported a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed earlier, broadly unchanged from **2023** (**81.4%**).
- Support was high across all age groups, ranging from **79%** among **25-34 year olds** to **84.7%** among people **aged 55 and over**.
- People who currently smoke or have smoked were slightly more supportive of screening than people who have never smoked (**84.2% vs. 80.0%**).

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 Canada 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 because treatment is more likely to be successful if lung cancer is diagnosed early.

In Canada, 34% of people said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer. While this is slightly below the global average, it is higher than in 2023 (32.9%), suggesting there has been little progress in improving symptom awareness. Around one in three people remain unable to identify any warning signs of the disease, highlighting the continued need to raise awareness and encourage people to seek medical advice when symptoms develop.

The symptoms most commonly identified were persistent coughing, coughing up blood, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and chest pain. Respondents also frequently mentioned wheezing,

phlegm or mucus, and breathing problems more generally. However, awareness of several other recognised symptoms was much lower. Comparatively few respondents identified unexplained weight loss, fatigue, loss of appetite, hoarseness or recurrent chest infections.

The findings suggest that awareness in Canada remains concentrated around the more widely recognised respiratory symptoms of lung cancer. Increasing awareness of the broader range of symptoms could help more people to recognise when something may be wrong, and to seek medical advice sooner.

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

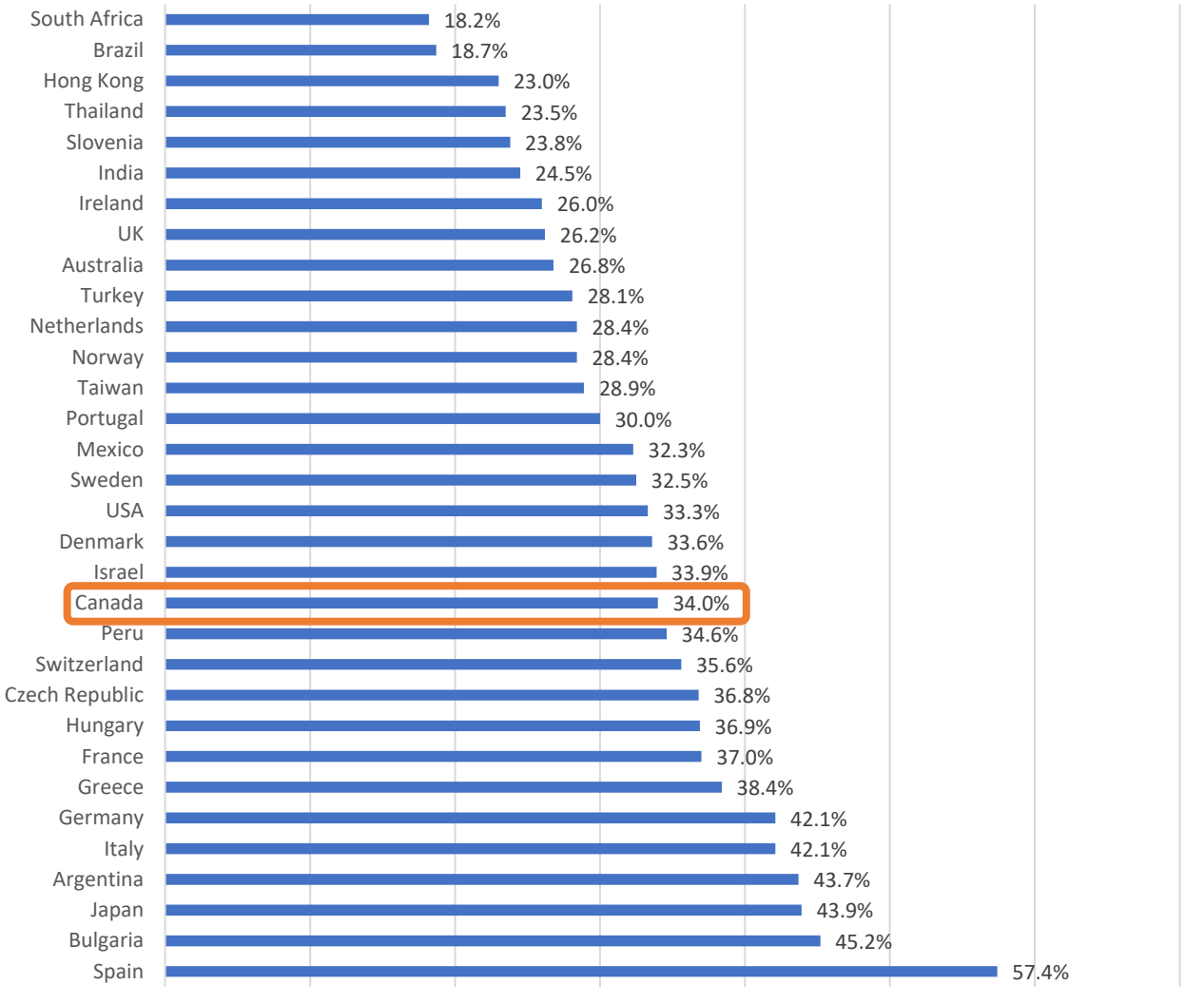


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in Canada who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

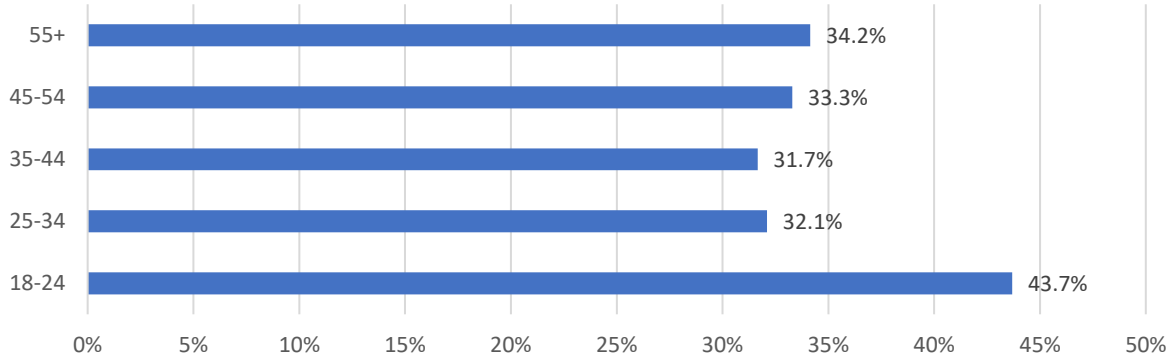
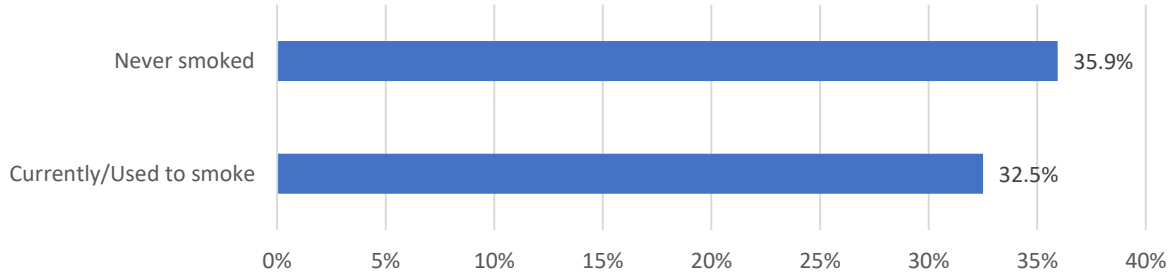


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in Canada who indicated they did not know any symptoms of smoking, by status



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 Canada, 36.9% of respondents agreed that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer. This was below the 2026 global average of 39.2%, but slightly higher than the 35.7% recorded in Canada in 2023. More than one in three people therefore still express less sympathy towards those affected by lung cancer.

The findings suggest that stigma remains a significant issue in Canada and that there has been little progress in shifting attitudes since 2023. Continued efforts are needed to challenge misconceptions about the disease, reduce blame directed at people affected by lung cancer and ensure that everyone impacted by the disease is treated with dignity and compassion.

[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

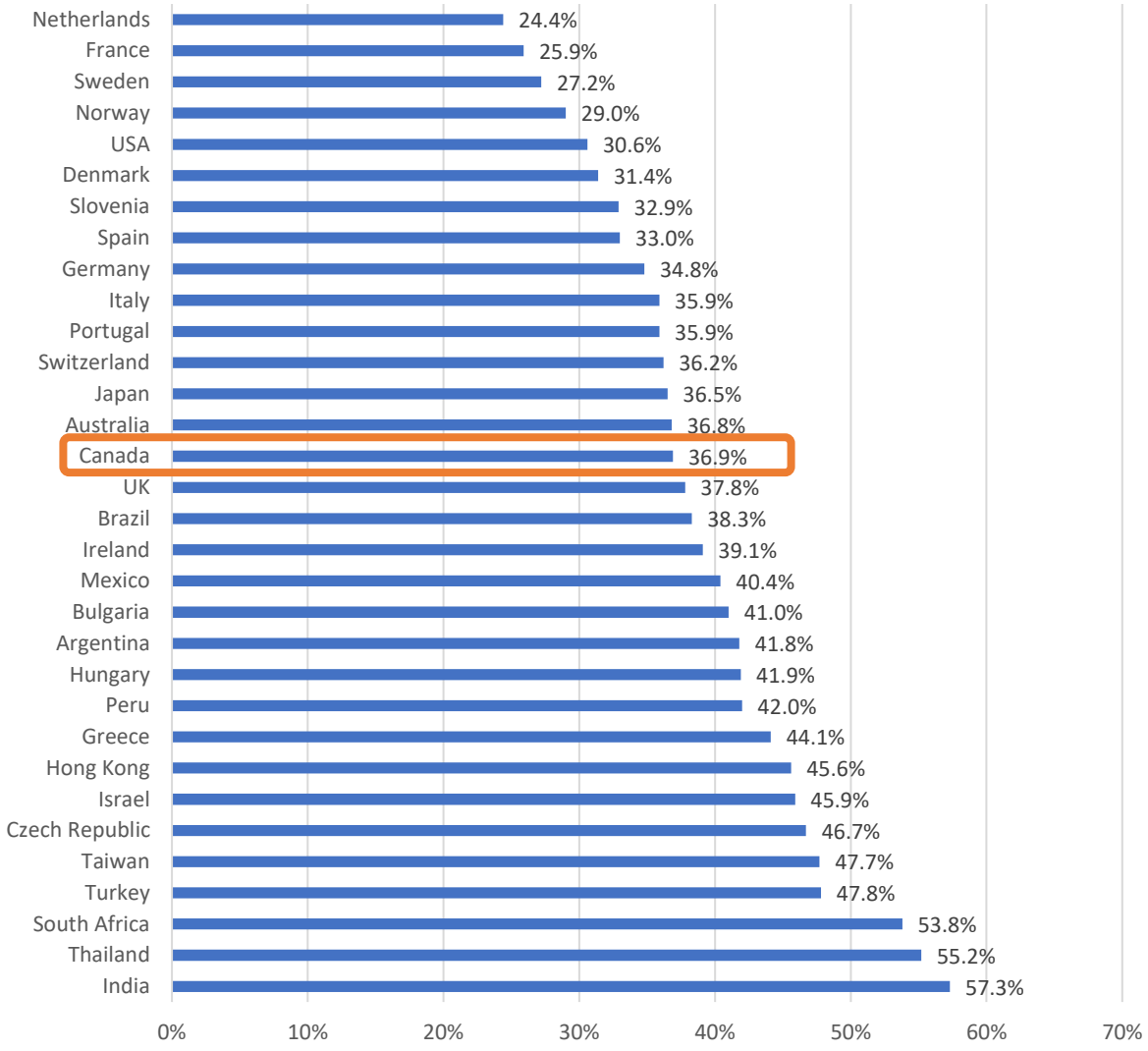


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in Canada who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

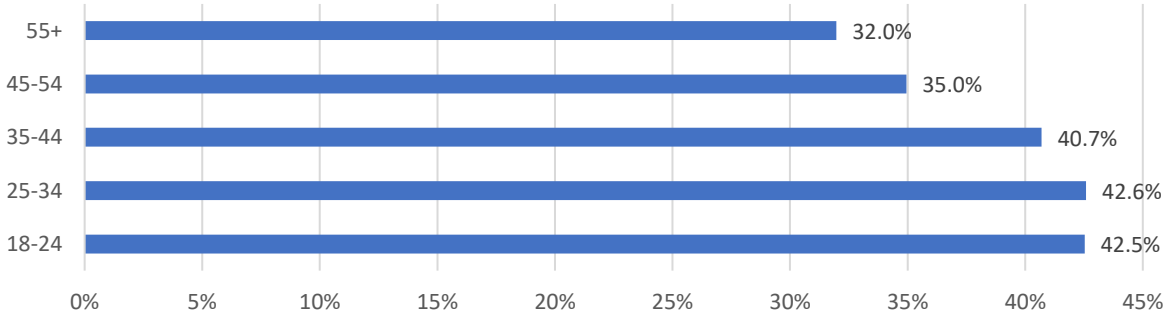
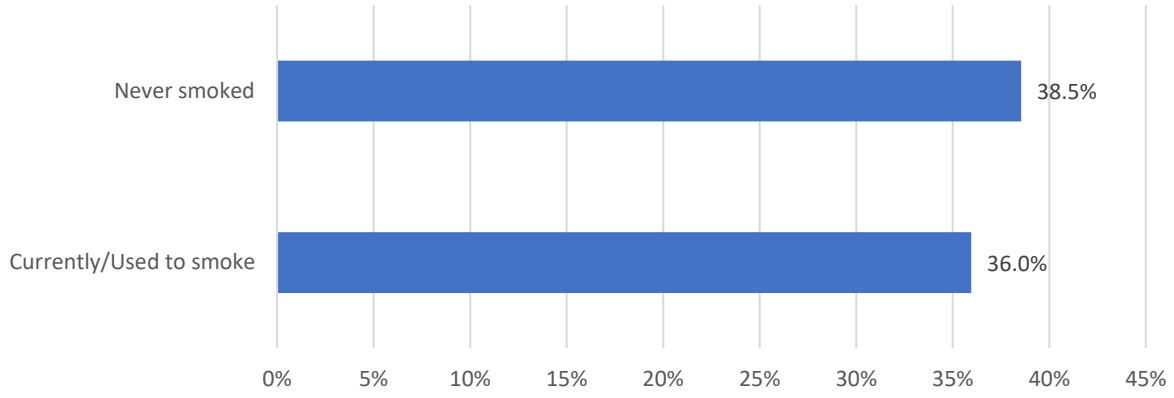


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in Canada who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



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 help detect lung cancer 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 Canada, with 82.5% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early. This was broadly unchanged from 81.4% in 2023, demonstrating sustained public support for initiatives to improve the earlier detection of lung cancer.

Canada has already taken important steps towards expanding access to lung cancer screening, with organised screening programmes available in several provinces, including Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Ontario, alongside pilot and demonstration programmes in other parts of the country. The Canadian Cancer Society notes that additional provinces are exploring or developing screening initiatives, reflecting growing recognition of the benefits of early detection.[3] The high and sustained level of public support identified in the GLCCs research reinforces the importance of continuing this progress and expanding access to screening so that more eligible people can benefit from earlier detection.

[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] Canadian Cancer Society. How do I find a lung cancer screening program? Available at: https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/find-cancer-early/get-screened-for-lung-cancer/how-do-i-find-a-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

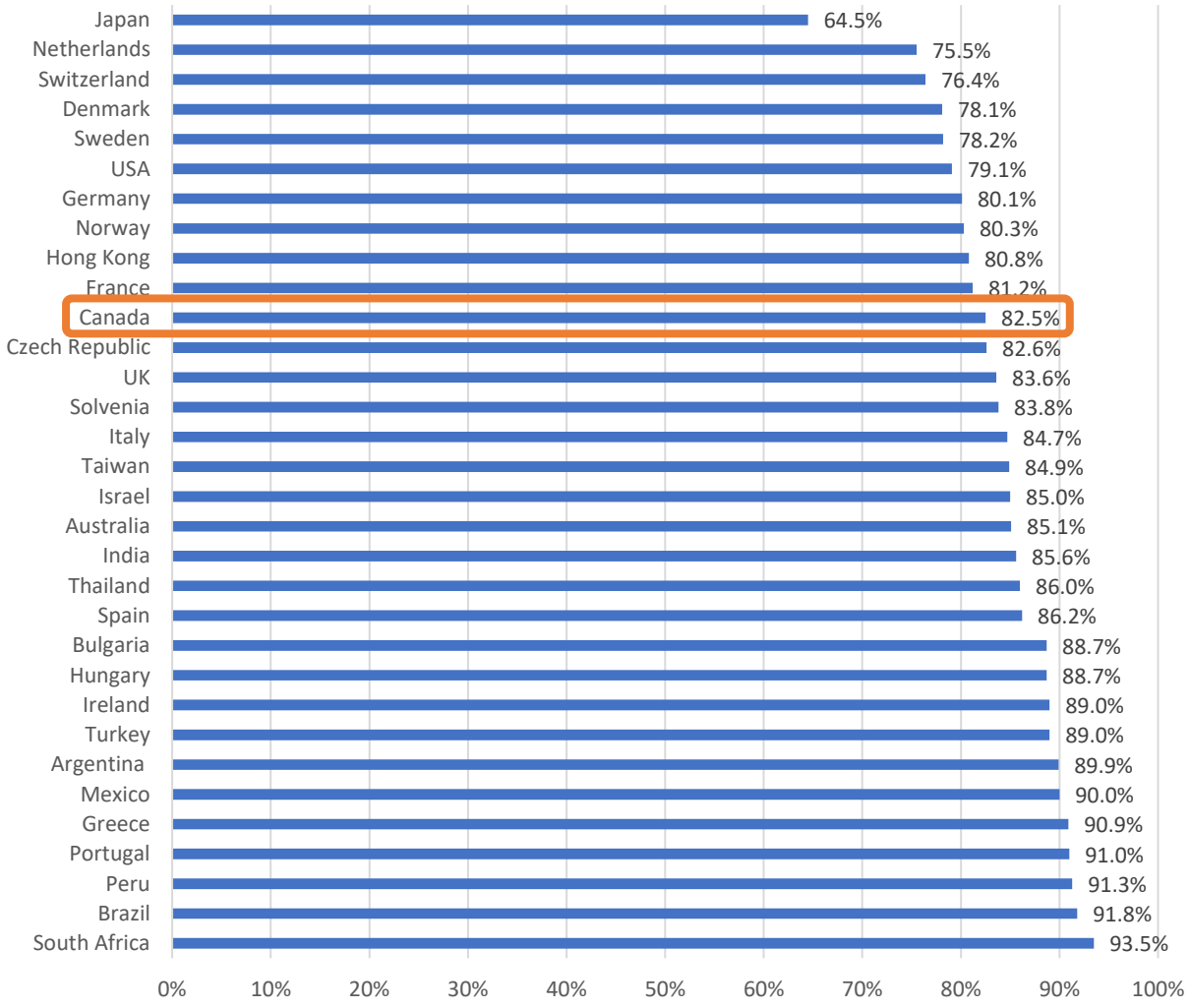


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in Canada who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

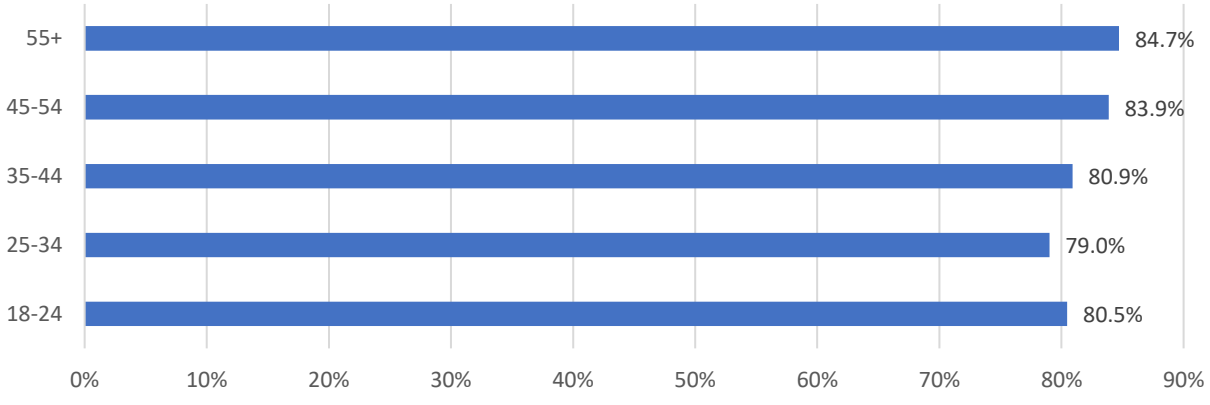
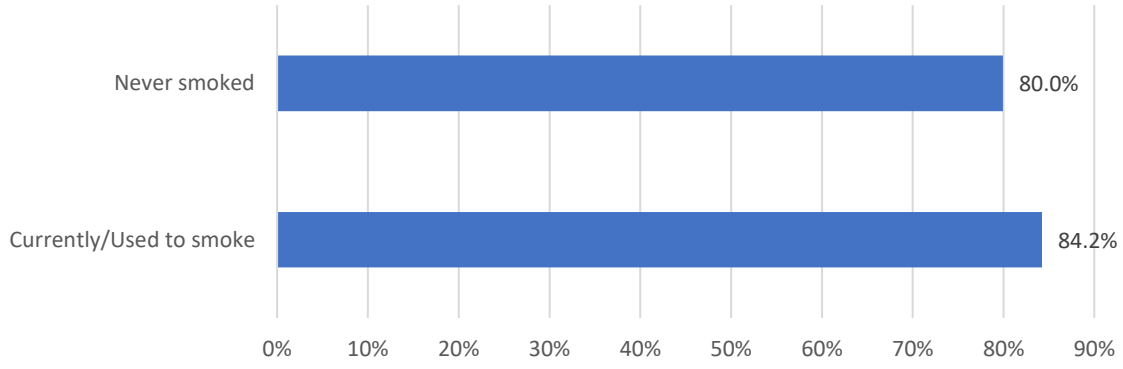


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in Canada who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The findings from Canada present a mixed picture. Compared with many countries included in the survey, symptom awareness is relatively strong, yet one in three people remain unable to identify any symptoms of lung cancer, highlighting an ongoing need for public awareness initiatives.

The survey also demonstrates that stigma towards lung cancer persists. Although levels of stigma in Canada are slightly lower than the global average, more than one-third of respondents reported having less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other cancers. Continued efforts to challenge misconceptions and emphasise that nobody deserves lung cancer will be important to reducing blame and supporting earlier diagnosis.

Encouragingly, public support for lung cancer screening is very high. With organised screening programmes already available in several provinces and further initiatives under development, Canada is well placed to build on this progress. Expanding equitable access to screening and increasing awareness of eligibility could help ensure more people benefit from earlier diagnosis, improved treatment options and better outcomes.

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.