GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

Sweden 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, which can be found on the GLCC website.

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 Sweden 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 moderate, with Sweden ranking just above the cross-country average for symptom recognition
- **Stigma** is less of a challenge in Sweden than other participating countries, but with more than a quarter of respondents acknowledging less sympathy for people with lung cancer compared with other cancer types, there remains work to be done to tackle perceptions
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** is strong is Sweden, with more than three quarters of respondents in favour of a screening programme. However, the proportion who are supportive is lower than most other countries surveyed

Key findings: Sweden

Symptom recognition

- Almost a **third** (**32.5%**) said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer.
- Men were more likely to report not knowing any symptoms compared to women (**40.9% vs 27.3%**).
- People aged 35-44 were most likely to report not knowing any symptoms (**36.5%**).
- People who currently smoke/have smoked were less likely to report not knowing any symptoms compared to people who have never smoked (**30.3% vs 36.8%**).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- More than a **quarter** (**27.2%**) of people agreed with the statement "I have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than other types of cancer"; this compares to **39.2%** globally.

- Men had less sympathy for people with lung cancer than women (**34.6% vs 22.6%**).
- People aged 18-24 had the least sympathy for people with lung cancer compared with other types of cancer, while people aged 55 and over had the most sympathy (**41.8% agreed vs 20.0% agreed**).
- People who currently smoke/have smoked were less sympathetic than people who have never smoked (**28.4% vs 24.7%** agreeing they had less sympathy).

Views on lung cancer screening

- More than **three quarters** of people (**78.2%**) agreed there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early.
- Women were more likely to support the need for lung cancer screening programmes than men (**83.1% vs 70.3%**).
- Support increased with age, from the highest among 55 and over (**84.4%**) and lowest among those aged 18-24 (**71.8%**).
- People who currently smoke/have smoked were more supportive of lung cancer screening programmes than people who have never smoked (**80.3% vs 73.0%**).

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 at least 1,000 adults (per country) 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.

The study found that 32.5% of people in Sweden said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer. This represents a modest improvement since 2023, when 33.7% reported not knowing any symptoms, suggesting that public awareness may be gradually improving. However, almost one in three people remain unable to identify any symptoms, highlighting the continued need for awareness campaigns that encourage people to recognise potential warning signs and seek medical advice promptly.

While 32.5% of people reported not knowing any symptoms of lung cancer, analysis of the open-response data shows that those who could identify symptoms tended to name the most important warning signs. Coughs and difficulty breathing dominated responses, suggesting that public awareness

is concentrated around the key symptoms most commonly highlighted in health awareness campaigns.

Compared with other countries included in the survey, Sweden continues to demonstrate moderate symptom awareness, ranking just above the cross-country average for the proportion of respondents unable to identify any symptoms. Nevertheless, awareness remains far from universal, and significant opportunities remain to improve understanding of lung cancer symptoms among the wider public.

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

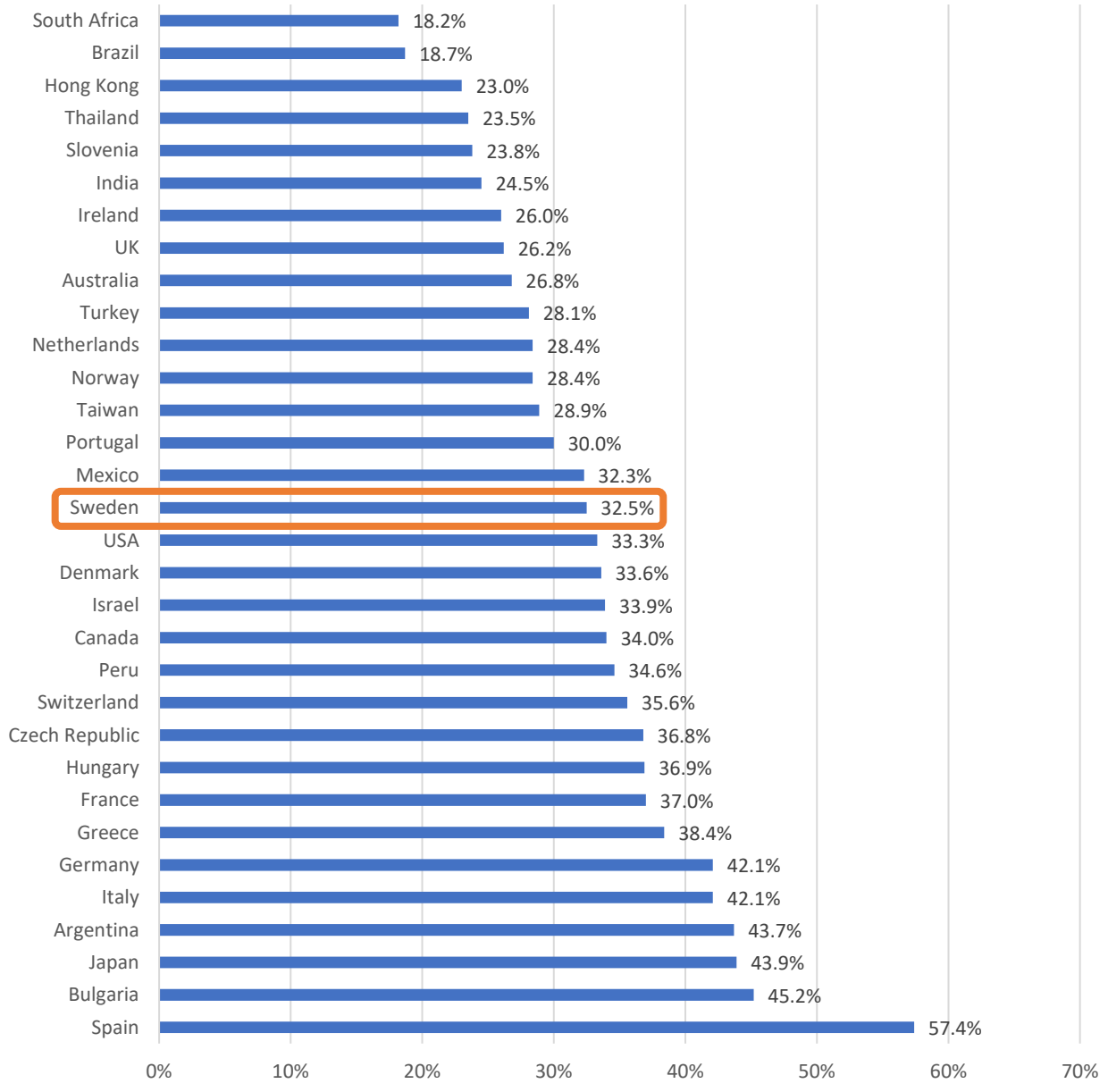


Chart 2: Percentage of respondents in Sweden who indicated they did not know any symptoms by age

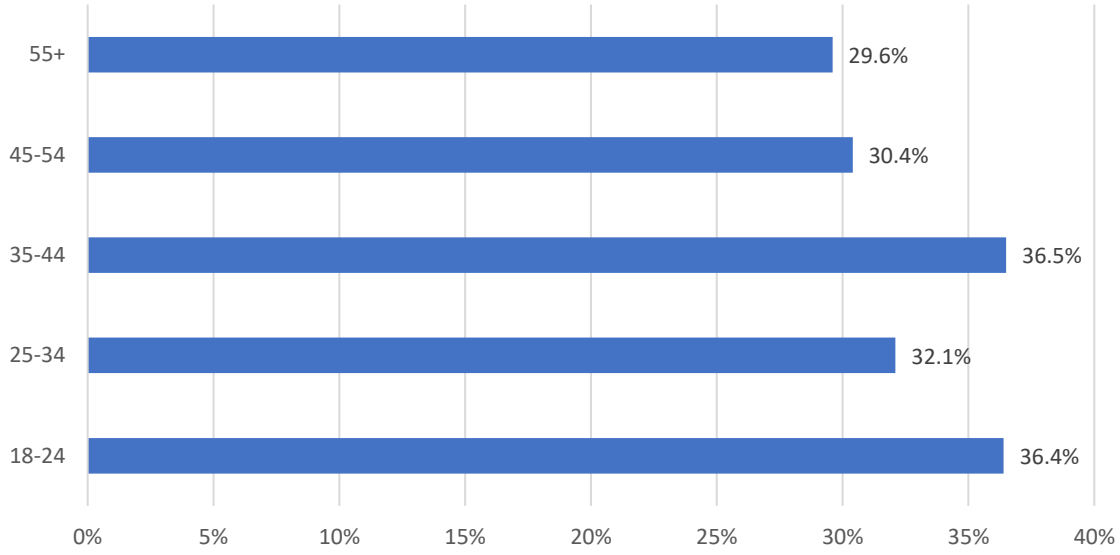
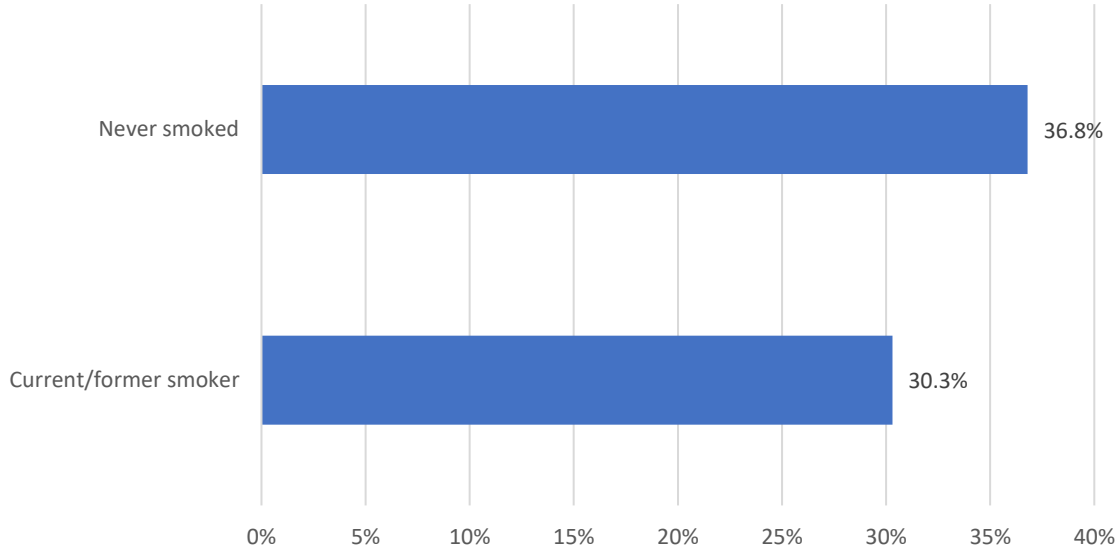


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in Sweden who indicated they did not know any symptoms by smoking status



Attitudes towards lung cancer

More than eight out of ten cases of lung cancer are linked to smoking creating stigma around the disease. This is a problem not only because thousands of people develop lung cancer who have never smoked, but also because people who have smoked may feel guilty and delay talking to their doctor about potential symptoms.

The GLCC believes that everyone - no matter what the cause of their cancer - deserves to have high quality treatment and care. No one deserves to have lung cancer. If lung cancer can be picked up early, then it improves people's chance of successful treatment and survival.

In Sweden, move than a quarter (27.2%) of respondents agreed with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer – representing an improvement on 2023, when 32.5% agreed with the statement. This suggests attitudes towards lung cancer may be becoming more understanding over time.

Sweden was one of the best performing countries, well below the global average in 2026 (39.2%), indicating that levels of stigma are significantly lower than those seen internationally. The findings show that misconceptions and stigma surrounding lung cancer remain significant challenges and reinforce the need for ongoing public education efforts.

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

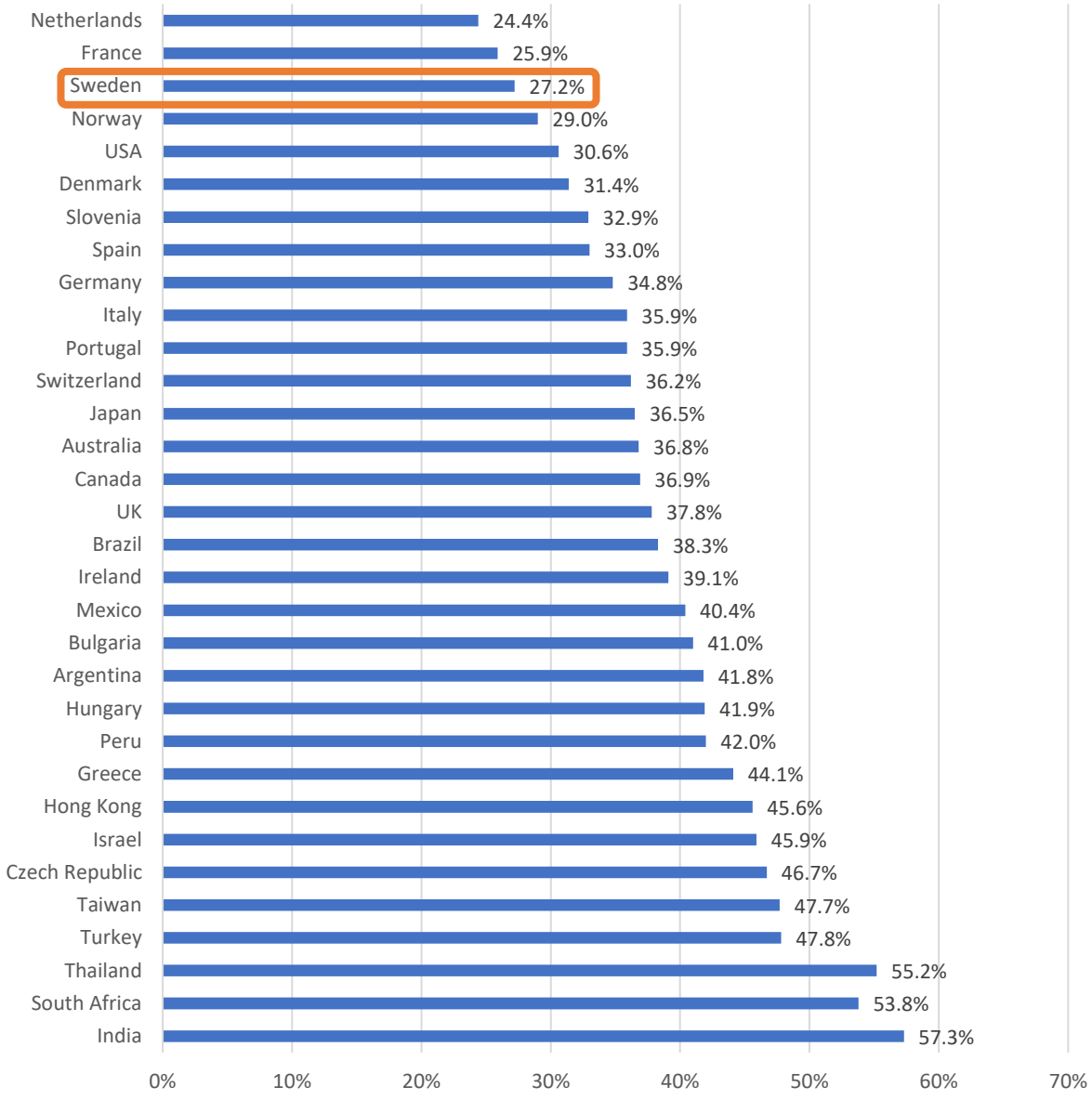


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in Sweden who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer by age

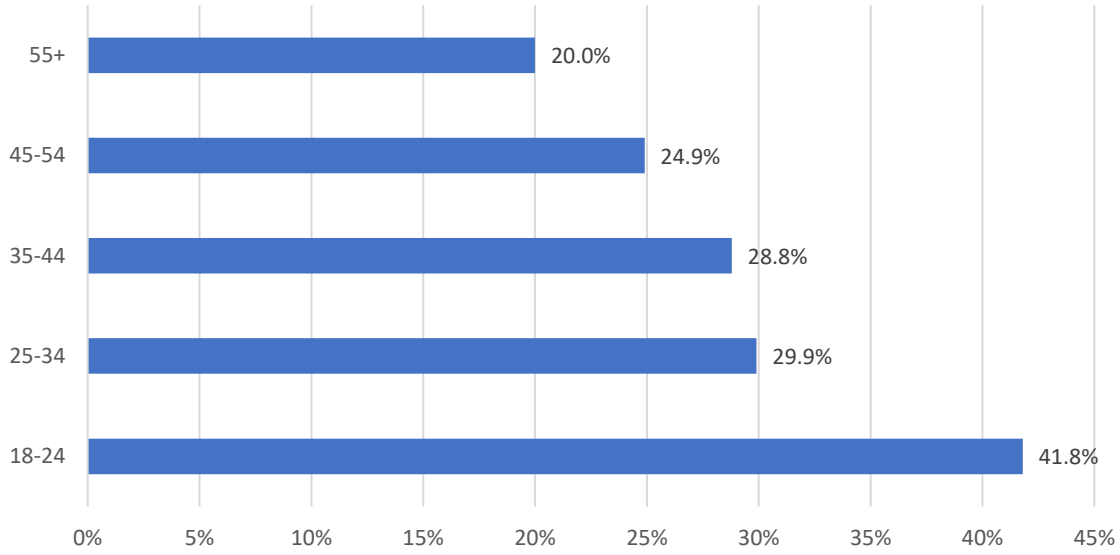
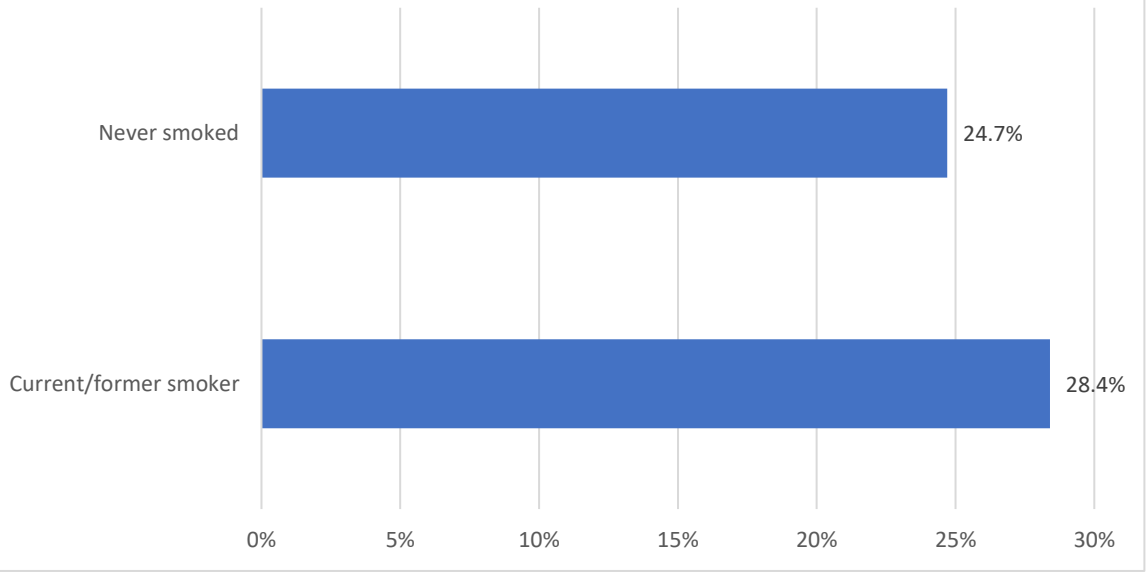


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in Sweden who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer by smoking status



Views on lung cancer screening

A national lung cancer screening programme is a key measure to reduce the huge burden that the disease currently imposes on the individuals affected, their families, as well as the country and healthcare system as a whole.

Lung cancer screening with a non-invasive scan of the lungs (low-dose computed tomography [LDCT]) saves lives by detecting the disease at an early stage when it is potentially curable. A large clinical trial of LDCT screening showed a 24% reduction in lung cancer mortality in men and a 33% reduction in women at 10 years of follow-up compared to no screening (de Koning 2020).

Support for lung cancer screening remains comparatively low in Sweden, with 78.2% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early. Despite ranking among countries with comparatively lower support levels, this represents a slight increase from 76.5% in 2023 and public support remains fairly high, with more than three in four people backing screening.

At present, a small number of countries have national lung cancer screening programmes. Given the impact they can have and the support for them globally, the GLCC calls on policymakers around the world to implement national lung cancer screening programmes to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed as early as possible.

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

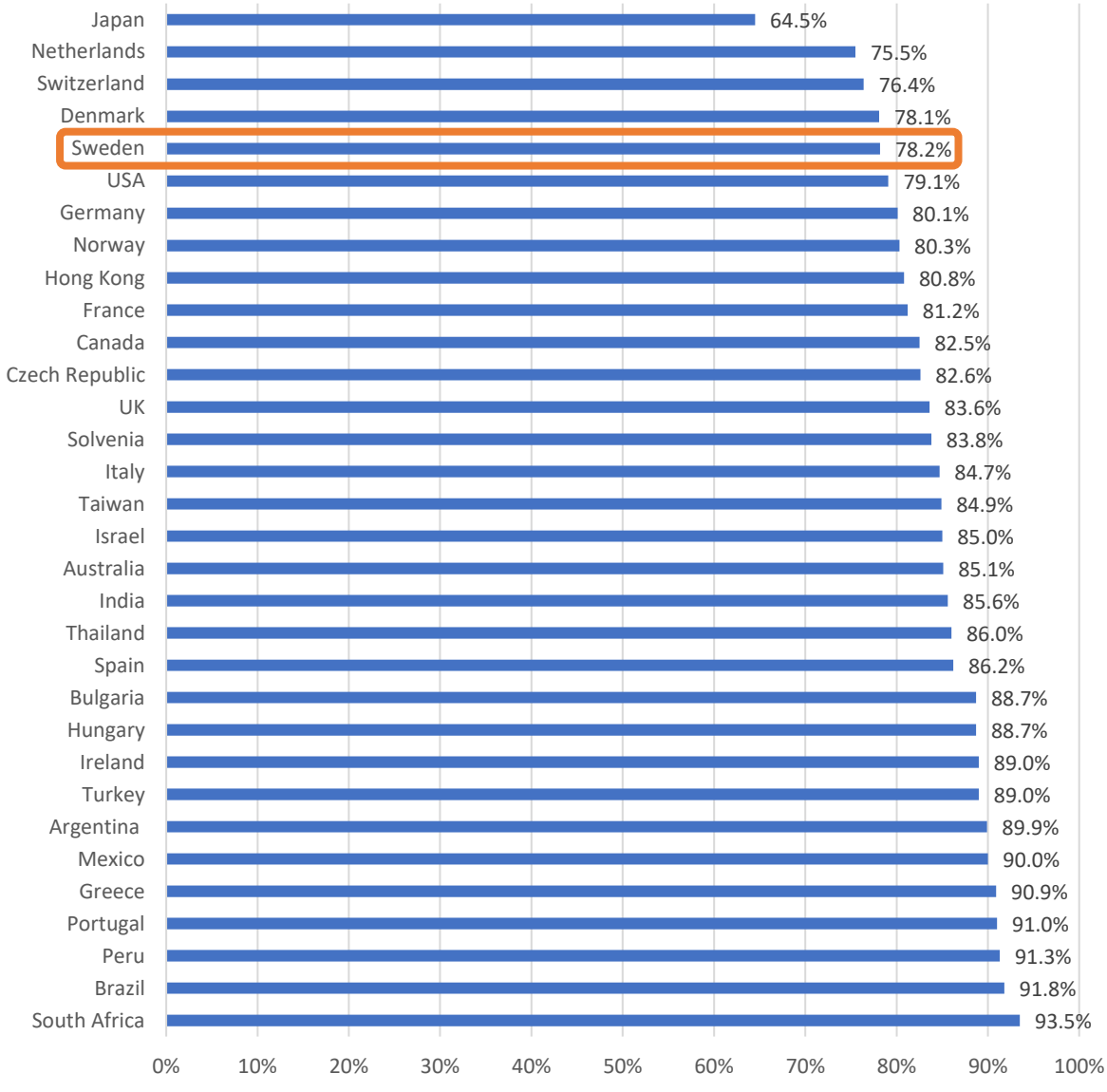


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in Sweden who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early by age

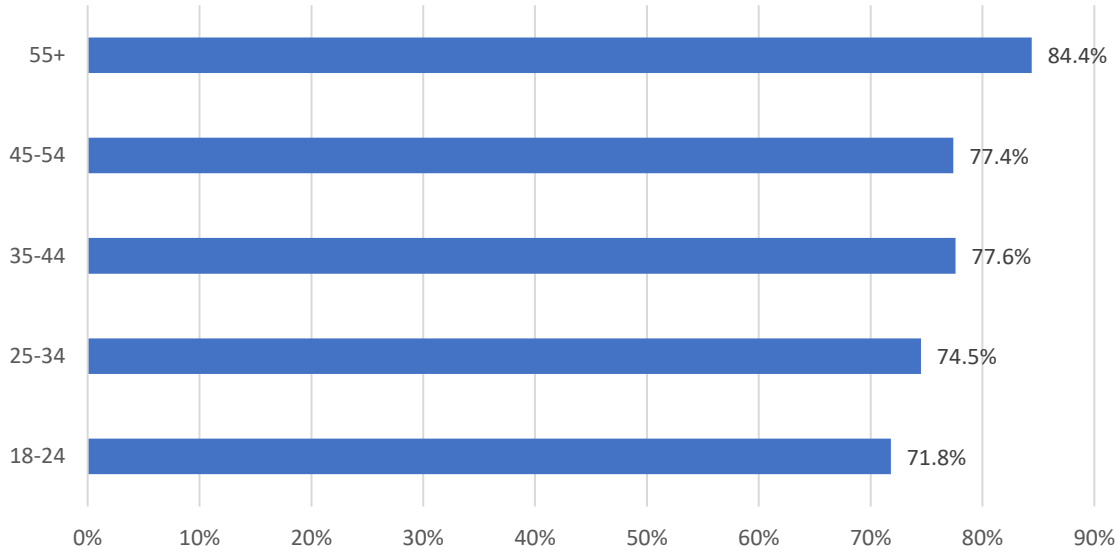
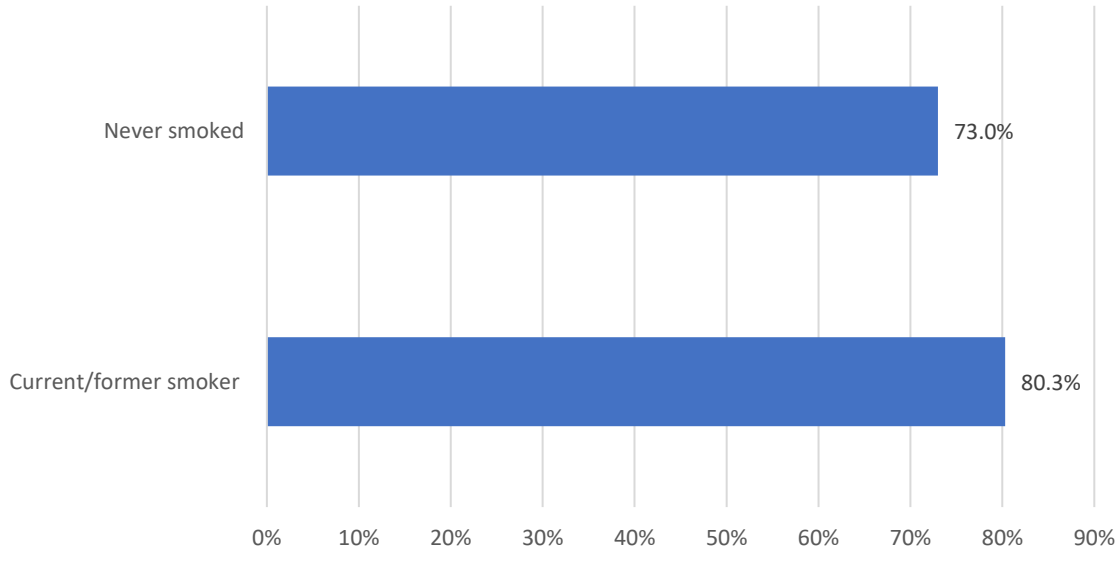


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in Sweden who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early by smoking status



Conclusion

While awareness of lung cancer symptoms in Sweden is broadly comparable to many other countries surveyed, more than one in four respondents remain unable to identify a single symptom, highlighting persistent gaps in public understanding. Awareness is particularly low among younger adults, suggesting a need for targeted education and awareness initiatives.

Stigma also remains a significant barrier, with more than one-third of respondents reporting less sympathy towards people with lung cancer than those with other cancers. This may contribute to misconceptions about the disease and discourage people from seeking support or engaging with discussions around lung cancer.

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Public support for lung cancer screening remains strong, with more than three-quarters of respondents favouring the introduction of a national screening programme. This provides a strong foundation for efforts to promote earlier diagnosis and improve lung cancer outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest there is an opportunity to strengthen awareness of lung cancer symptoms, challenge stigma, and build on public support for earlier detection initiatives, helping more people access diagnosis and treatment at an earlier stage.

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.