GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

USA 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 USA in 2026 and compares them with results from other countries included in the survey. The findings highlight three key themes:

- **Awareness of lung cancer symptoms** remains mixed, with the USA ranking around the middle of the countries included in the survey for symptom recognition. One-third of respondents were unable to name a symptom of lung cancer.
- **Stigma towards people with lung cancer** is lower than the global average, with fewer than one-third of respondents reporting that they have 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 established screening programmes in the USA.

Key findings: USA

Symptom recognition

- **One in three** people responding to the survey (**33.3%**) said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, down from **37%** in **2023**.
- Lack of symptom awareness was highest among **18-24 year olds** (**47.8%**), compared with **30.3%** of those aged **55 and over**.
- People who currently smoke or had smoked previously were less likely than people who had never smoked to not be able to identify at least one symptom of lung cancer (**30.5% vs. 35.8%**).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- **Three in ten** respondents (**30.6%**) agreed with the statement: *"I have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer"*, down from **44%** in **2023** and below the **2026 global average** of **39.2%**.
- Men were more likely than women to report less sympathy towards people with lung cancer (**37.3% vs. 25.7%**).
- Reported stigma was highest among people **aged 35-44** (**38.1%**), and lowest among those aged **55 and over** (**24.9%**).
- People who had never smoked were more likely than those who currently smoke or had smoked previously to report less sympathy towards people with lung cancer (**32.1% vs. 29.6%**).

Views on lung cancer screening

- Almost **eight in ten** respondents (**79.1%**) agreed there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, down from **84.2%** in **2023**.
- Women were more likely than men to support a national lung cancer screening programme (**80.9% vs. 76.7%**).
- Support was highest among people **aged 55 and over (82.3%)**.
- People who currently smoke or had smoked previously were more likely than people who had never smoked to support a national lung cancer screening programme (**82.5% vs. 75.2%**).

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 USA 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 important, as recognising potential symptoms and seeking medical advice can support earlier diagnosis and better treatment outcomes.

In 2026, 33.3% of people in the USA said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, down from 37% in 2023. This places the USA around the middle of countries included in the survey for symptom awareness.

The open-response data suggest that the symptoms most commonly identified by respondents were persistent cough, shortness of breath or breathing difficulties, coughing up blood, and chest pain.

Respondents also identified fatigue, unexplained weight loss, wheezing, hoarseness, and loss of appetite, while recurrent infections, bone pain and voice changes were less commonly recognised.

The findings suggest that, despite some improvement since 2023, important gaps in symptom awareness remain. Increasing awareness of the range of potential lung cancer could help more people recognise when they may need to seek medical advice.

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

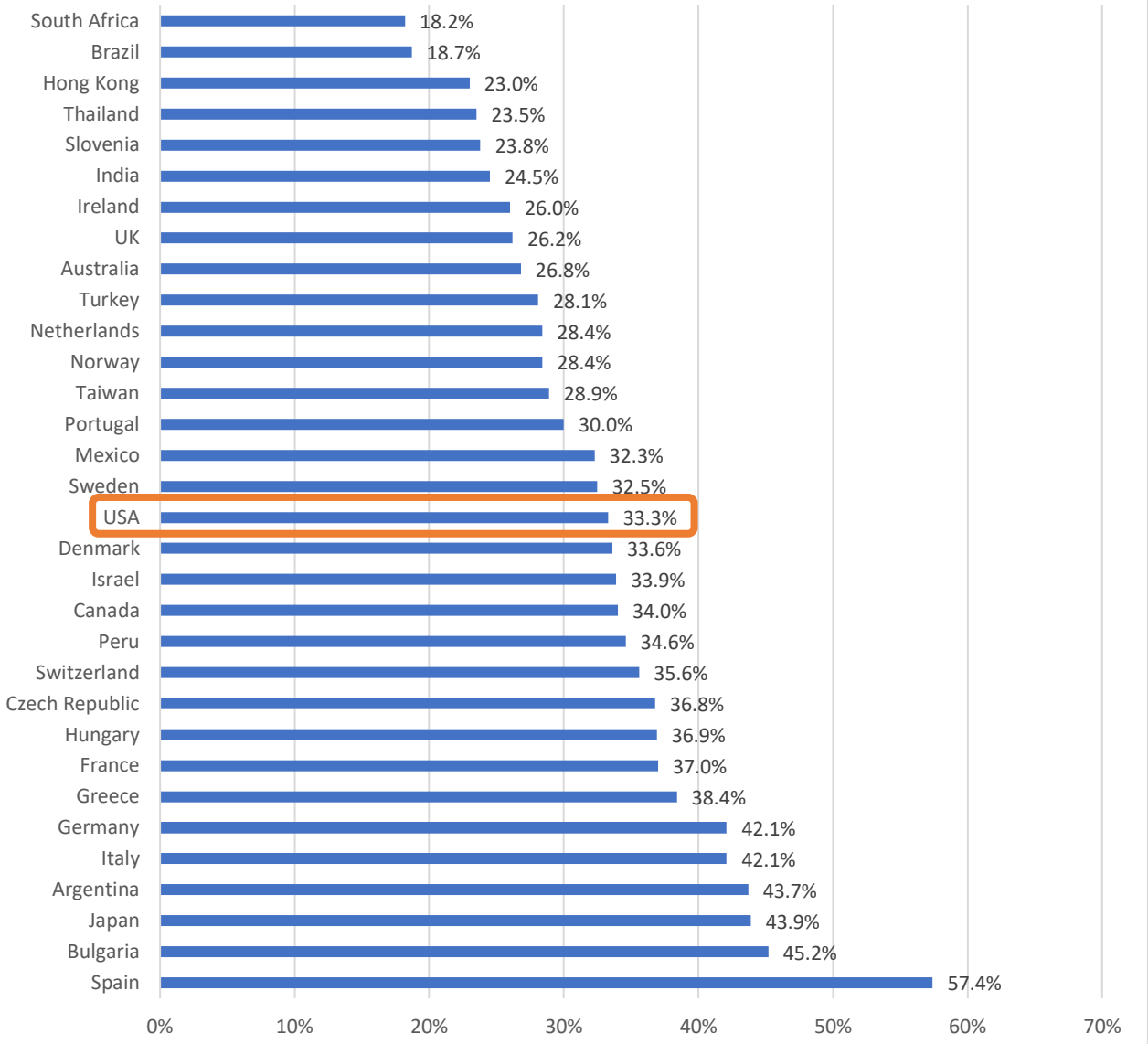


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in the USA who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

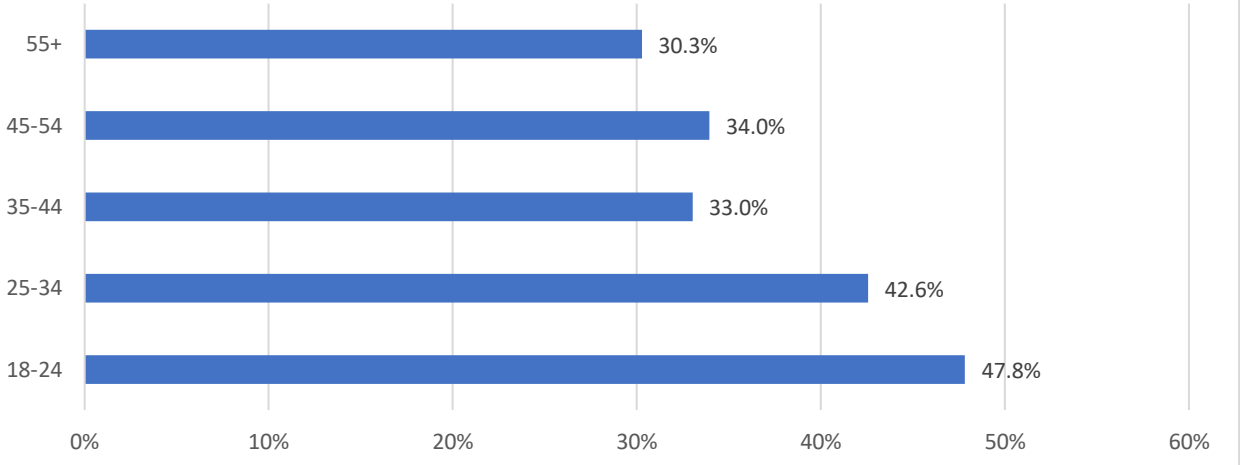
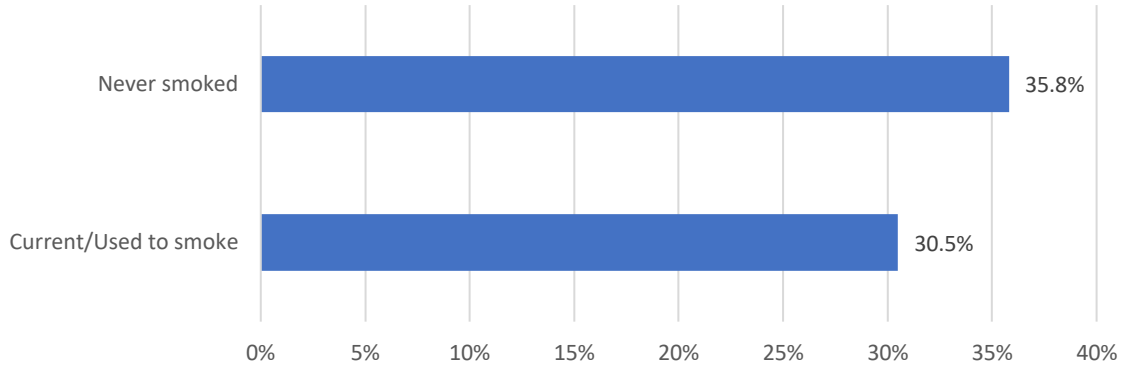


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in the USA who indicated they did not know any symptoms of smoking, by status



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] However, lung cancer can affect anyone, regardless of smoking history, and stigma can negatively affect experiences of people living with the disease. 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 USA, 30.6% of respondents agreed with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer, down from 44% in 2023. This is also below the 2026 global average of 39.2%, placing the USA among the countries reporting lower levels of stigma.

The findings suggest that attitudes towards people with lung cancer have improved since 2023. However, almost one-third of respondents still expressed this view, indicating that stigma remains an important issue.

[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

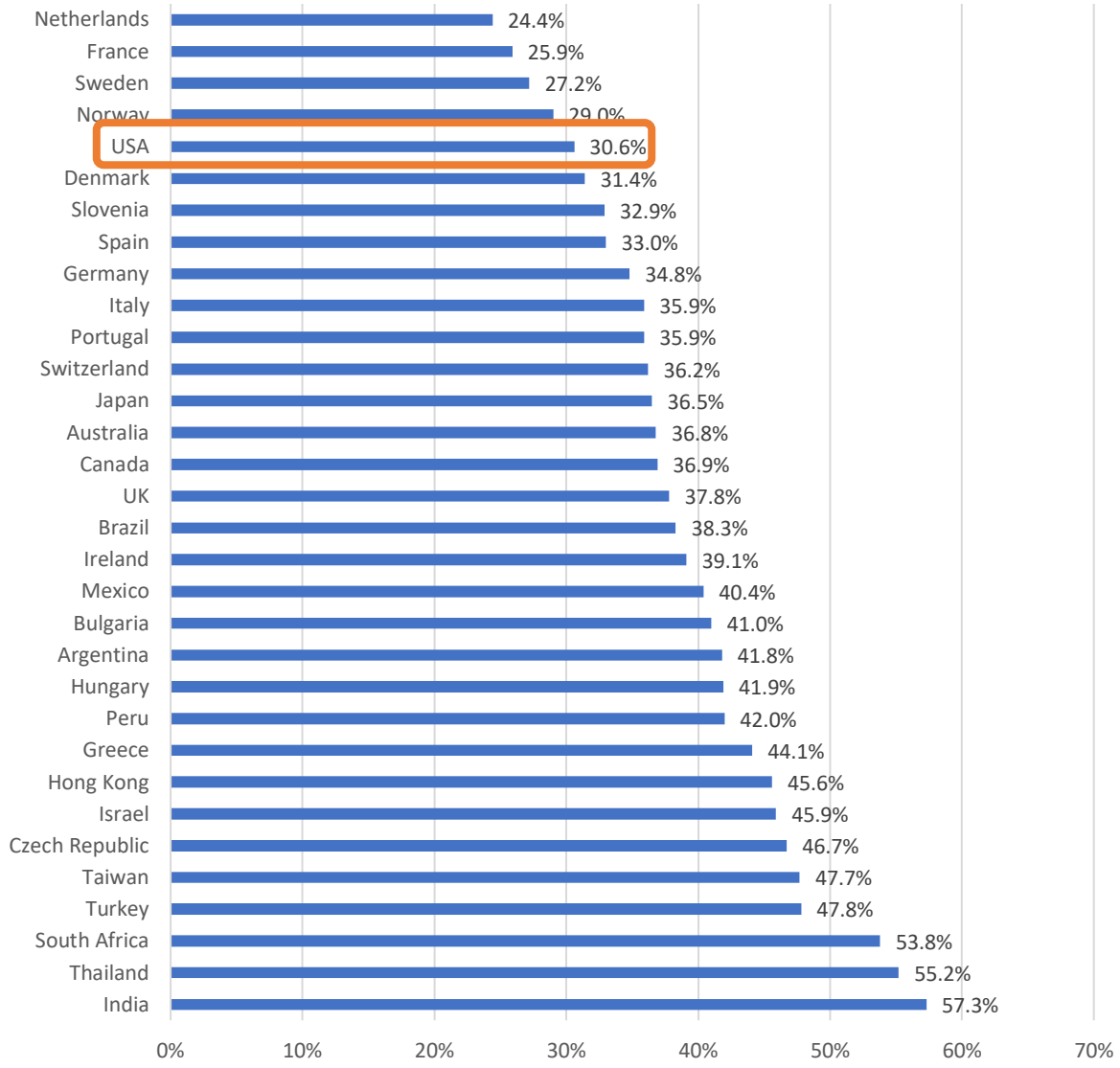


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in the USA who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

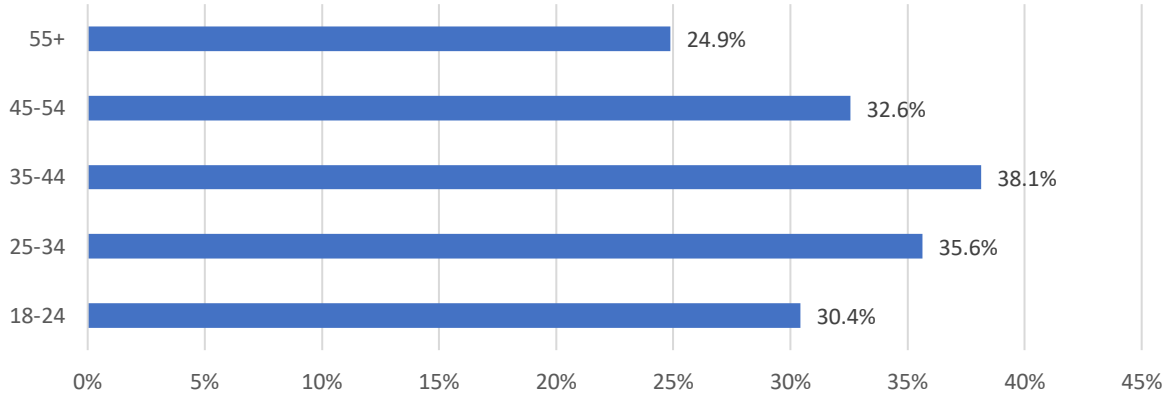
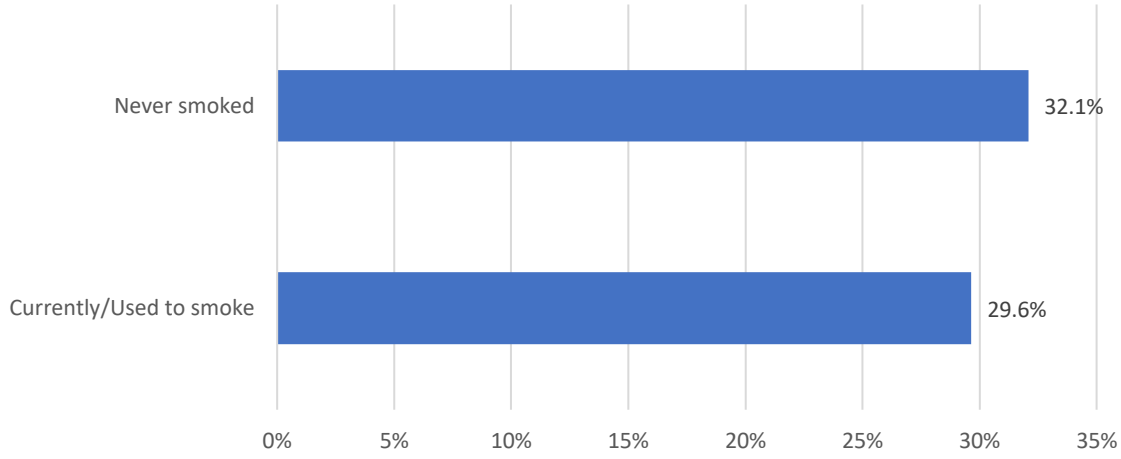


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in the USA who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



Views on lung cancer screening

Lung cancer screening can support earlier diagnosis by detecting the disease at an earlier, more treatable stage. Evidence from a large clinical trial found that low-dose computed tomography (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]

The USA has had a national lung cancer screening programme for people at high-risk of developing lung cancer since 2015, with more than 4,000 sites now offering annual low-dose CT screening across the country.[3] However, participation remains low among those eligible for screening, highlighting the importance of continued efforts to raise awareness and improve uptake among people at higher risk of lung cancer.

GLCC's research shows that public support for screening remains high with 79.1% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national screening programme. While this is down from 84.2% in 2023, almost eight in ten respondents continued to support screening, demonstrating sustained public support for 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] Lung Cancer Policy Network (2022). *The US national lung cancer screening programme*. Available at: https://www.lungcancerpolicynetwork.com/the-us-national-lung-cancer-screening-programme/ (Accessed: September 2026).

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

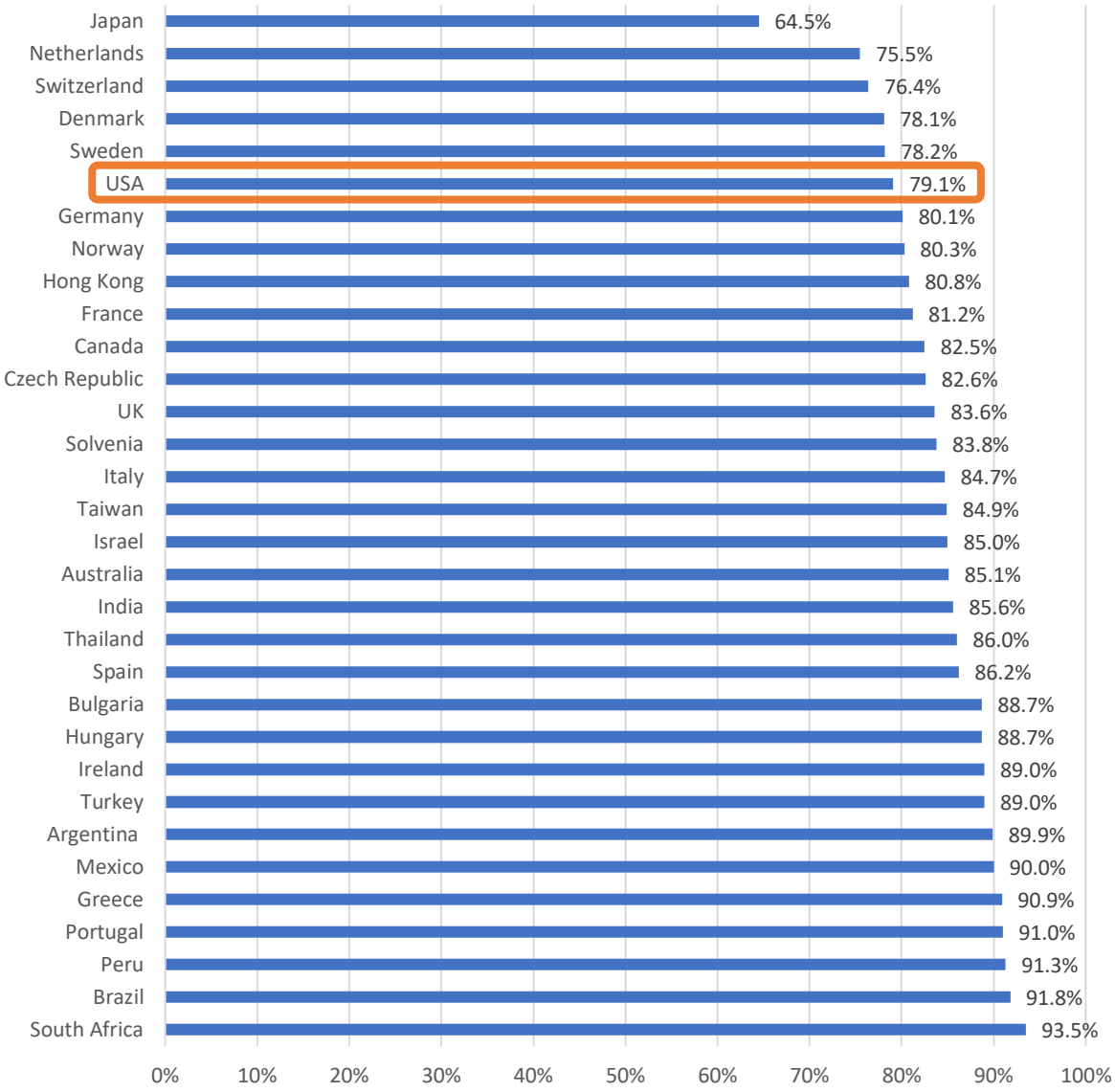


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in the USA who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

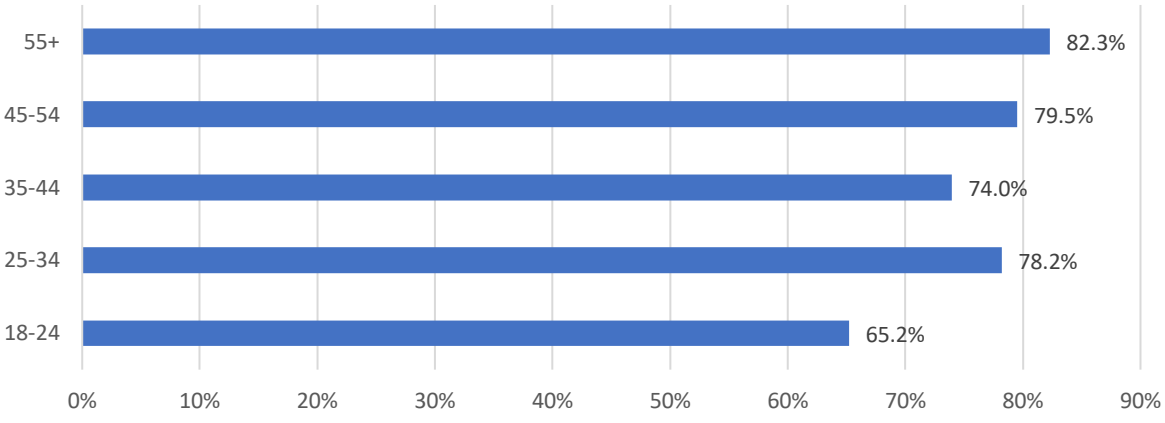
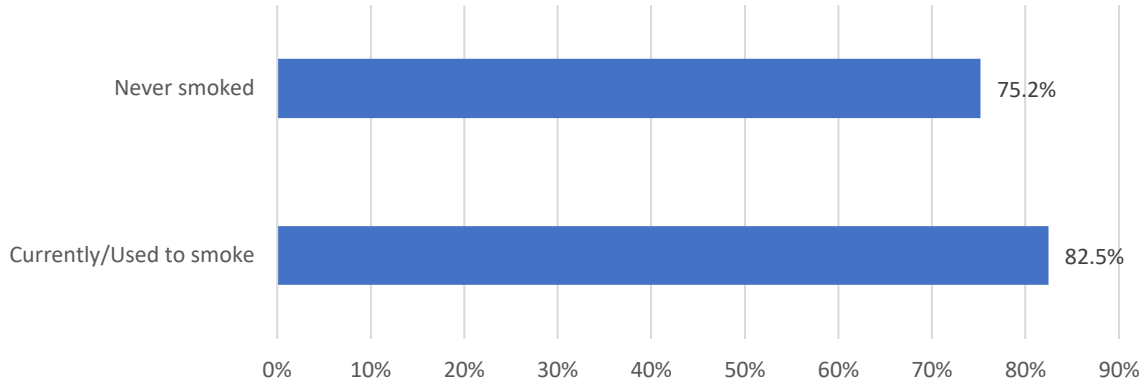


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in the USA who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The 2026 findings show that, while public support for lung cancer screening remains strong in the USA and levels of stigma are lower than in many other countries, important challenges remain. Awareness of lung cancer symptoms is mixed, with one-third of respondents unable to identify a single symptom of lung cancer.

Although attitudes towards people with lung cancer are generally more positive than in many countries included in the survey, 30.6% of respondents reported less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other cancers, indicating that stigma and misconceptions have not been eliminated.

Public support for lung cancer screening remains strong, with 79.1% of respondents supporting a national screening programme. This demonstrates continued backing for efforts to improve early diagnosis and maximise participation in established screening programmes.

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 USA.

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.