



**Cancer Society**

Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

How you're  
making a  
difference for  
New Zealanders  
facing cancer

# Newscan

**SPRING 2025**

**Advancing  
research in  
the fight  
against  
aggressive  
blood cancer**





# Welcome to the Spring edition of Newscan 2025!

As spring blooms around New Zealand, so too does the spirit of hope and determination in our shared mission to reduce the impact of cancer.

In this issue, you'll see the heart of our community in action. We celebrate the incredible success of Daffodil Day, where schools, businesses, and supporters came together in an unforgettable show of unity against cancer. You'll also meet Al and Kathryn, who share their moving story of support through the Cancer Society, and read about Sam's inspiring marathon in honour of her siblings.

We shine a spotlight on Annika's research that's paving the way for future breakthroughs, and you'll hear from Zane, one of our volunteer drivers, whose story is a powerful reminder of how everyday acts of kindness can change lives.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for being part of this journey. Every story, every breakthrough, and every moment of care shared in these pages exists because of your generosity and hope in a cancer-free future.

Ngā mihi,  
*Helen Carter*

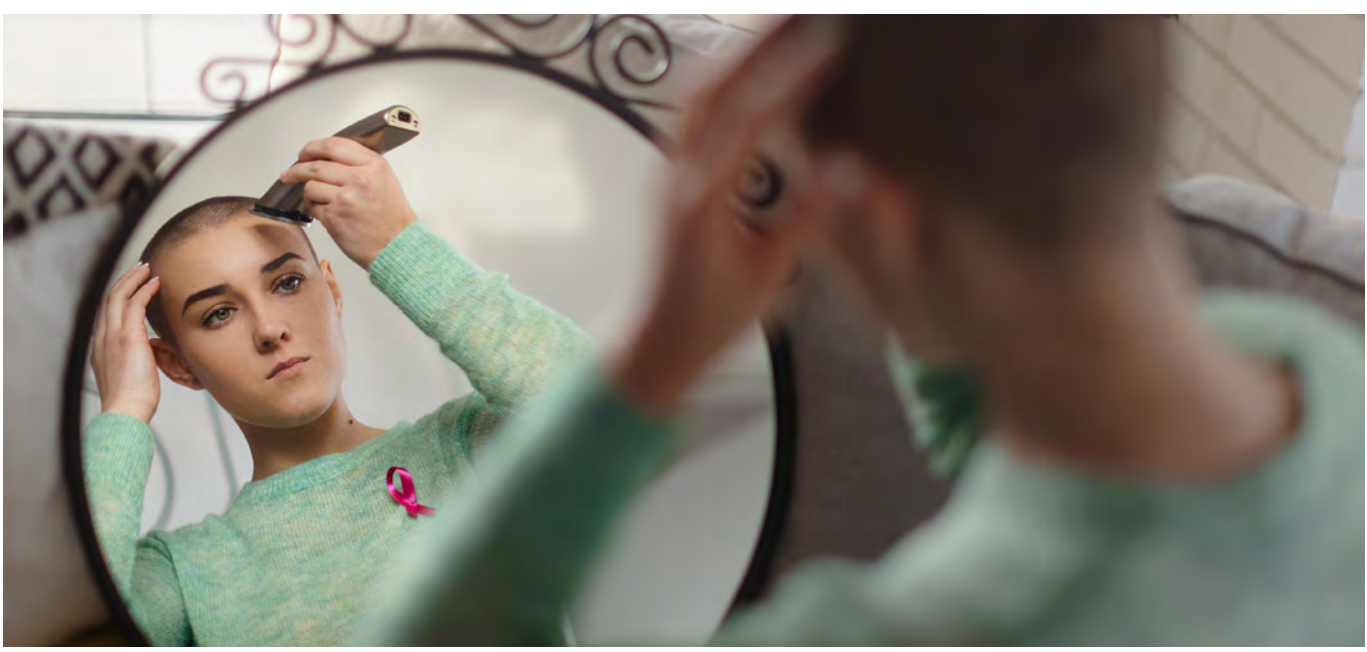
**Helen Carter**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Cancer Society  
Waikato/Bay of Plenty



## Daffodil Day, New Zealand United Against Cancer!

For 35 years, Daffodil Day has brought Kiwis together in a powerful show of unity, raising vital funds and awareness for the Cancer Society's life-changing work.

Take a moment to enjoy these snapshots from an incredible day of community, compassion, and courage.



## Young people and cancer: What's going on?

**Every year, the number of New Zealanders diagnosed with cancer increases, and every year, thousands lose their lives to this horrible disease. In 2025, we have now reached a shocking number: 77 New Zealanders diagnosed with cancer every single day.**

But what's even more worrying is the unprecedented number of people under the age of 50 getting cancer, and scientists are trying to figure out why.

A global study published in the medical journal, BMJ Oncology, found that cancer cases in people under 50 years (defined as early-onset cancers) rose by 79% between 1990 and 2019. The deadliest types include breast, windpipe, lung, colorectal, and stomach cancers.

In New Zealand, colorectal cancer is especially concerning. It's our second deadliest cancer, and cases in under-50s have jumped 26% per decade since 2000. For Māori, the increase is even higher: 36%.

That's why researchers like Christchurch-based colorectal surgeon Professor Frank Frizelle are

looking at what happens in the first 30 years of life. What we eat, breathe, and touch might affect our health much later.

Alongside known key risk factors like poor diet, alcohol consumption, and smoking, one emerging theory is that microplastics may play a role. These tiny plastic particles found in the air, water, and even food have made their way inside our bodies. Globally, they've been discovered in blood, breast milk, and even cancer tumours.

Frizelle believes these microplastics might be affecting the gut microbiome - the tiny bugs that live in our digestive system - and increasing cancer risk.

As cancer rates rise in younger people, researchers like Frizelle are working hard to understand the causes. Whether it's diet, pollution, or plastics, it's clear that modern life is changing our bodies in ways we're only beginning to understand. The hope is that by uncovering these hidden risks, we can protect future generations and improve early detection and prevention.





Al, Cancer Patient

## “Having the Cancer Society Lodge can be the difference in your recovery.” – Al

Just a few years ago, Al was running ultra-marathons in the best shape of his life. But then the dizzy spells started, leading to a devastating diagnosis: Myelodysplastic syndrome, a precursor to leukaemia.

The results were a devastating shock.

But from the start, Al and his wife Kathryn agreed on how to handle it. “We were just going to focus now on what was ahead of us and not what was behind us. We could only control some things, and those are the things we focused on.”

The plan was a bone marrow transplant, but twice their hopes were dashed with a long waiting list of patients ahead of them, and a potential donor unable to meet the timeline. Each setback meant more chemotherapy to keep Al in remission.

The treatment meant months away from their home and support system.

That’s when the Cancer Society stepped in, providing a home away from home. Kathryn remembers the day clearly.

**“We were incredibly grateful to get to stay at the Cancer Society Lodge because I went straight to the Lodge and Al was admitted to the hospital immediately. It was one thing we didn’t have to worry about. And the staff, they were just so supportive and understanding.”**

Being close to the hospital made a huge difference. “Sometimes when you tried to phone through to the hospital, you couldn’t get hold of anyone, so it was easy for me to jump on the shuttle, talk to someone in person, and then be back with answers for Al not long after.”



Al and his wife Kathryn

The Lodge became their home for nearly eight months.

**“For us, it was safer to be so close to the hospital - it was huge to have that. It meant that we could just focus on Al and his recovery.”**

“The support wasn’t just practical; it was financial and emotional, too. The Cancer Society helped us with some petrol, so that whole financial worry that is there, they were able to alleviate a bit.”

The relationships built at the Lodge also became an unexpected source of comfort. From the staff who were almost like family, the sense of community was strong. Other guests became close friends, too.

**“We would be cooking together, sharing stories, and hearing the reassuring words ‘I know what that’s like, and you’ll get through this.’ We’ve even kept in touch with some of them.”**

On Matariki in July 2024, he finally received his transplant. “That was quite a nice thing, a new year for us, it was kind of symbolic.”

For Kathryn, the message to those who make that support possible is simple: “Thank you for paying it forward, really and growing this place to what it is.”



Al



Al with his granddaughter

### Your generosity makes a difference.

Every year, thousands of Kiwis like Kathryn and Al find care, comfort, and connection at our Cancer Society Lodge while they undergo treatment. You can help ensure this support is here for the next family who needs it.

Visit [cancer.org.nz/donatenow](https://cancer.org.nz/donatenow) or use the donation form enclosed with your magazine. Thank you for being part of their journey.





Sam with Mandy and Cory



Sam post run

## More than a run: Sam's journey to honour her siblings and give back

**For Sam, running to raise funds for the Cancer Society isn't about chasing a personal best, it's about making a difference.**

"I think I've said on my fundraising page that this is being fuelled by grief and delusion. I was the kid who hid on cross-country day in the bathrooms because I didn't want to run. And so this is out of character for me, but there's a reason."

This challenge is deeply personal. In 2021, Sam's family lost her older sister Mandy to lung cancer.

"Mandy went to the hospital after feeling unwell, and very quickly we found out she had cancer. Just as quickly, her health declined."

Mandy passed away on 17 August 2021. In 2024, heartbreak struck again. Sam's brother Cory was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed away just seven weeks later, on the 27th of September 2024.

Despite how quickly their illnesses progressed, Sam

remembers the support her family received from the Cancer Society.

"Mum and Mandy both stayed in the Cancer Society Lions Lodge, because that was like a five-month journey in and out of hospital... Particularly during that palliative care time, the Cancer Society really showed up for her."

This experience inspired Sam to fundraise through her run. "Through both Mandy and Cory's journeys, I never wanted anyone to be worried about money or resourcing. It just seems so unfair that someone should have to worry about something like that when they're either fighting for their life or coming to the end of their life. And so being able to contribute in this way... It has a meaningful impact."

Sam hopes her story inspires others, both to participate in events to support the Cancer Society.

**"I want to show up and show the Cancer Society that we're grateful for the work that they do."**

### If Sam's story has inspired you, why not take on your own challenge?

Marathon in a Month is a great way to get involved - you can walk, run, or jog 42 km throughout November, at your own pace and in your own time, while raising vital funds for the Cancer Society.

Details and registration can be found here: <https://marathoninamonth.org.nz/>

## Advancing research in the fight against aggressive blood cancer

Dr Annika Seddon is a research fellow at the University of Otago in Christchurch. Earlier this year, she was awarded a Cancer Society post-doctoral fellowship grant for her research focused on acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), a highly aggressive blood cancer.

"AML is a type of blood cancer that starts in the bone marrow, which is responsible for producing all the immune cells in our body.

In leukaemia, the bone marrow starts producing large numbers of abnormal white blood cells, that flood the bloodstream without being able to perform the essential immune functions we rely on.

It's like sending out a battalion of untrained soldiers into a high-stakes mission - they're not equipped to help, and they end up doing more harm than good."

Her research focuses on improving existing treatments for older patients with AML who often can't tolerate traditional chemotherapy or transplants.



Cancer Researcher, Dr Annika Seddon

Alongside this research, Annika is also looking at why people develop cancer in the first place.

"Patients come into the clinic and ask, 'why me?', and that's something that has always really fascinated me as well. And so, we are going to look at how malfunctioning mitochondria might contribute to stalling how the white blood cells are produced."

Annika's work could lead to breakthroughs for people facing leukaemia. She is one of many Cancer Society funded researchers working to improve treatment options, extend lives, and give families more time together made possible by the generosity of supporters like you.

### I've just been diagnosed with cancer – what should I do first?

**Answered by Supportive Care Manager, Michelle Gundersen-Reid**

A cancer diagnosis can bring a whirlwind of emotions and questions. First, take a deep breath - you've just had life-changing news. It's common to feel scared, shocked, angry or numb. You don't have to figure everything out right away.

#### Start small:

**Talk to someone you trust.** Even just saying the words out loud can take a weight off.

**Bring someone you trust along to your specialist appointments.** When we feel overwhelmed it can be difficult to take in information. Having someone with you to listen and ask questions can help.

**Know that the Cancer Society is here for you.** Call our Information Helpline on 0800 CANCER (226 237). You'll get to talk to a nurse who'll explain things, answer your questions, or just listen if that's what you need most right now. They will also be able to link you up to our other free support services like nursing and access to counselling.



Zane, Volunteer driver

## Zane's story of giving back

For the past year, Zane has found joy and purpose in volunteering as a driver for the Cancer Society. While completing his Bachelor of Business, he gives his time whenever he can.

"My Grandma had breast cancer, and it was really hard because she lived overseas. As a child it was difficult to be so far away from a family member that was struggling so much.

Years later, when my closest friend said that his brother had been diagnosed with osteosarcoma, I instantly said, 'I'll help! I'll be there, whatever you need.'

And it became quite apparent that they actually did need a lot of support. Particularly around just being able to get from A to B."

That experience opened Zane's eyes to how something as simple as transport can be life-

changing for families facing cancer. It inspired him to become a volunteer driver with the Cancer Society.

**"The big motivating factor is just being able to help people. You're giving back and there's a lot of people who do need help. And so, it's a big privilege to be able to help them."**

We urgently need more drivers to help people get to treatment. Whether you can give one morning a month or a few days a week, you'll be making a real difference for someone going through one of the toughest times of their life.

If you'd like to join Zane and our incredible team of volunteers, please get in touch with our Volunteer Team at [volunteering@cancersociety.org.nz](mailto:volunteering@cancersociety.org.nz)

**1,000+**

volunteer drivers  
transporting cancer patients



**1,000,000+**

kilometers driven to get Kiwis the  
treatment they need

