Wellington Division
Cancer Society
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

cannews
Wellington Division



Living in the here and now, with your support

I think it's true for most people who get cancer; it all happens pretty quickly. One minute you're healthy, and the next you have a diagnosis.

A couple of years ago, I noticed visible changes in my breast. I saw a nurse practitioner who thought it was most likely painless mastitis. I felt a bit of an idiot because I'd told my husband, Jonn, that I thought I might have breast cancer, and had scared the life out of him.

The breast clinic called me in for a biopsy anyway, and waiting for the result was terrible because there was no one you could contact about it. Then in February last year, we were told it was Stage 3 Invasive Lobular Carcinoma.

It sounds odd, but by that time I was almost relieved that it was cancer because it meant I hadn't been panicking about nothing. Also, because of my career as a community oncology nurse, and then a community palliative nurse, cancer and death were very much a part of my experience. Jonn was really upset because he didn't have a clue what was going on, and he started thinking about life after I was gone, which really turned his world upside down.

The recommendation for my treatment was to do chemotherapy then surgery. I was supposed to do six chemo cycles of three weeks, but I got really sick on it, so before my fifth, I said I didn't want to do any more. I was nervous to turn it down, which is a really weird thing because I used to advocate for patients all the time, but when it's you, you just feel out of sorts.

I had the surgery in July last year, and I asked for a bilateral mastectomy. Unfortunately, post-surgery, the histology report came back saying that the chemotherapy hadn't done anything, and that all the auxiliary nodes they'd removed had cancer



Above: *Fourth chemotherapy treatment.*

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Kia ora and welcome to the **Spring/Summer 2026 edition of CanNews!**



I've recently been on holiday with family, and since returning, it has been fantastic to see the wonderful work that has continued across Cancer Society Wellington Division.

In this issue, Wendie shares her cancer journey, from nurse to patient, and how our services, alongside the support of her husband Jonn, continue to help her manage the day-to-day of a cancer diagnosis.

As International Volunteer Year comes to a close, we celebrate the generosity of our volunteers across our services and events. We deeply appreciate their mahi, and are honoured they were recognised nationally as finalists in the NZ Volunteering Awards 2026.

You'll also read about a range of other initiatives – Dragon Boating's new season, former staff member Rachael's research on Margaret Stewart House guests, and Manaaki Whānau Cancer Services Team Lead, Charla, shares about her work in the Hutt Valley. We recap another successful Daffodil Day and look ahead to summer events where you can fundraise while being active in our community.

Your support, whether through volunteering, donating, or both, is deeply valued. As a non-government funded charity, we simply couldn't offer our cancer services without your kindness, generosity and support

Ngā mihi nui, thank you.

Darryl Carpenter

Darryl Carpenter
Tumu Whakarae/Chief Executive
Cancer Society Wellington Division







Above: *Wendie and Jonn at home.*
Left Top: *Wendie and Jonn at Relay For Life 2026.*
Left Bottom: *Cancer Society Porirua Walking Group.*

About 30 of us meet at the Cancer Society office in Porirua once a month to talk about the everyday of what it's like having cancer. And because the group is always getting new members, you're part of the support group for people at all points in their journey. You can show them that, yes, it does get quite grim, but look at me now! It's just a really safe, comforting and hopeful place to be. Jonn even went along to one, and as someone who doesn't like that sort of thing, he felt very welcome. Some carers do come regularly, and we all acknowledge that it is really hard for them too.

The Coffee Group also gets you involved in lots of other things. We started a smaller walking group every Wednesday (except for the coffee group days!), who've gotten to know each other really well, and we just have a bit of a giggle. Jonn and I also went to Relay For Life, and that was amazing seeing all the young people raising funds.

Now I actually see my cancer as being a blessing. I say that because ten years ago, our son was suddenly killed, and we never got to say goodbye. His boys were two and a half and four at the time, and we've raised them since then. So for me, the whole concept of having cancer and knowing life might not be as long as you think it is gives you a chance to make the most of every day and value people.

I recently asked my oncologist for a prognosis. Even though the MRI showed there was no more cancer, the chances are my cancer will likely be what I die of, but as to how long I've got, who knows. The way I look at it, I'm free to get on with life. It's awesome to think I will be around for a few more special moments, and I'm really looking forward to this Christmas together as a family!

It's lovely knowing the Cancer Society is always going to be there. It's a really important safety net that has lots of different arms, and it's all the little things they do that mean so much.

I'm really aware that there are so many good causes out there, and they all need money. The thing about cancer is that it affects families at such a deep level, and you need the Cancer Society more and more, because the health service just isn't providing the kind of support people, families, and carers need. It's such a great organisation to support, and donations are used to deliver amazing services.

You don't know what you're going to need until you need it, and that's where the Cancer Society makes all the difference, and I think everyone involved is just fantastic!

in them. That meant the long-term prognosis wasn't great, but they did find that my cancer would be positive for Herceptin treatment, so I started on that as well as local radiotherapy in September.

From my days as an oncology nurse, I got to know the Cancer Society Wellington staff really well. I used to rely on their services for my patients, especially their volunteer drivers, and I received several really practical grants for patients. It was just amazing to see the difference their support made.

The first thing I got help with was hospital parking. That is awesome! When you're having treatment, and you're not feeling great, knowing you don't have to worry about finding a park is a huge relief.

And going in for rounds of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, parking would have cost a fortune! They also give out things like silky pillows, which are incredible - you can't do a mastectomy without them! I had two drains coming out of my tummy as well, so they gave me a nice drain bag, which meant I could go out with confidence.

But the biggest thing has been the personal support. You reach a stage where you really can't keep talking about your cancer with your friends. They've supported you through the diagnosis and treatment, then you get to a point where you feel like you're just making a bit of a fuss. So when I finished treatment, I decided to join the Monthly Morning Coffee Group in Porirua, and it's been the best.



Cancer Society Dragon Boating: Much More Than a Race!

Above: The Cancer Society Wellington team out on the water in Wellington Harbour.
***Below:** Cheryl and husband Gareth at the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival.*

Cancer Society Wellington is proud to be the official charity partner for the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival in the Wellington Harbour each year.

All funds raised help provide support, comfort, and hope to patients and their whānau through our services, and contribute to research and prevention.

At this year's Wellington Dragon Boat Festival, Cancer Society Wellington was also delighted to field two of our own crews, led by one of our passionate counsellors, Brenda.

Cheryl was one of our paddlers and, like many others in our team, is a cancer survivor. She shared a little about her experience.

"I was diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer in 2019," Cheryl said. "Thankfully, I've been cancer-free since my treatment ended in 2020.

I joined the Cancer Society team partly because I had paddled with Brenda before and her joy on the water really inspired me, but also because I wanted to support Cancer Society Wellington.

When I was going through my treatment, they were always so welcoming, and knowing the people,





***Left:** Cheryl and the team celebrating.*
***Below:** Cheryl (right) paddling with the team.*

resources, and even car parking were always there for me felt so good. I definitely appreciated the Cancer Society volunteers during treatment, too. They always offer you drinks and food to make you more comfortable, and can even organise a ride home if you need it. They're just amazing!"

In this year's event, the first team won gold in the D Grade Social Competition and the second team placed fifth in the highly competitive A Level Final.

Beyond the racing, the day was filled with camaraderie, as Cancer Society clients, whānau, volunteers, and staff all came together to connect. Many participants also shared their personal stories, as well as the joy they experience from being part of the team. This shared spirit of community and wellness defines our Dragon Boat whānau, as Cheryl explained.

"The whole point of the event was to have fun (although we were highly competitive during the actual race!).

But paddling for such an amazing organisation is great. When you get out there to paddle on the water with people who either had cancer, had family members with cancer, or are Cancer Society staff and volunteers, you feel united for a common reason. You can talk about different things we've all gone through – having the common group that totally understands it."

We can't wait to do it all again in February 2027, and Cheryl recommends joining a team to anyone!

"Getting out on the water each practice night is a really good way to forget about all of your day-to-day stresses. I think paddling with your team on a still night is just the most amazing thing you can do.



You're in the fresh air and having fun with a group of like-minded people. It's an amazing sensation, and when you're paddling, you're honouring everyone who has gone through cancer, whether they are survivors or they've passed. You're there on behalf of everyone who can't be there, and supporting everything the Cancer Society stands for.

I just encourage everyone to try it or get involved somehow!"

Team entries are now open.
If you'd like to find out more, visit the Dragon Boat Festival website,
dragonboatfestival.org.nz



More than a roof over their heads

New research shows how Margaret Stewart House helps people get through their cancer treatment away from home. Rachael Luxford, our former weekend Front of House at Margaret Stewart House (MSH), shares her findings with us. Seven adult patients and carers who had stayed at MSH shared their stories in in-depth interviews, supported by Cancer Society Wellington.

For many people with cancer, treatment means leaving home. Care is often centralised, so patients and their carers can find themselves travelling to Wellington and staying for weeks. In that time, a place to stay becomes a temporary home. A new study by Rachael Luxford (MSc Health Psychology, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington) explored what that experience is like at MSH.

MSH is Cancer Society Wellington's homely outpatient community. Right near Wellington Hospital, it has a garden, kitchen, lounge, library, and 18 private bedrooms to allow our guests to feel at home while they're in and out of Wellington Hospital for cancer treatment.

A safe, homely base

Residents described MSH as much more than accommodation. Private rooms, shared kitchens, warmth, and familiar routines helped them feel settled. They valued being able to move between shared company and quiet retreat, rather than having to choose one or the other.

Lifting the load

Being close to the hospital, having transport sorted, and having clear information and well-organised household systems all took work off residents' plates. One carer said it was like "peeling away the layers of stress", leaving more room to focus on the patient and the treatment ahead.

Kindness and connection

People remembered the welcome they received and the small moments with staff and other residents, from a chat in the kitchen to a bit of perspective from someone who understood. Not everyone wanted the same amount of company, though, and living in a shared home could sometimes be tough.

Holding on to hope

Residents leaned on their own ways of coping, including routines, humour, fresh air, spirituality, mind–body practices, family roles and helping others. MSH served as a warm space for guests to keep up with these practices.



Where support could fit better

The study also highlighted areas for improvement: family restrictions, coordination and communication gaps, financial pressure and aspects of the building. Additionally, carers and support people's own needs were sometimes less visible than those of patients.

What this means for places like MSH

The research suggests that support comes from place, people, practical systems and atmosphere working together. Considerations include:

- protecting the warm, low-demand home environment
- recognising the everyday, informal support staff provide
- offering low-pressure connection alongside real permission to retreat
- making arrival and coordination easier, such as a short pre-arrival guide
- paying closer attention to carers and whānau
- treating rest, lighting, heating and noise as wellbeing issues
- supporting staff with clear roles, debriefing and supervision
- keeping cultural responsiveness everyday and flexible





Top Left: *Rachael with her Academic Research Poster.*
Top Right: *The welcoming foyer at MSH.*
Bottom Right: *Rachael and a guest enjoy one of the MSH lounge areas.*

A note on the research

This was a study of seven residents at MSH, so the results don't speak for all cancer patients. What the research does offer is detailed insight into how support is felt. The research will also help service providers ask better questions about what patients and carers need.

Making everyday life more manageable is part of supporting people through cancer treatment.

Our thanks to the former residents who generously shared their experiences.

Luxford, R. (2026). Psychosocial Support and Meaning-Making During Cancer Treatment: An Interpretive Study of Residents at Margaret Stewart House [Master's thesis submitted for examination]. Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.



Meet Charla Onekawa

Leading with Equity and Manaakitanga at the Hutt Hub

As Manaaki Whānau Cancer Services Team Lead at our Hutt Hub in Pretoria House, Central Lower Hutt, Charla Onekawa leads a team that supports individuals and whānau affected by cancer with culturally responsive care, guidance and advocacy.

A place that shapes the mahi

The Hutt Hub sits in the heart of central Lower Hutt near Te Awakairangi river with clear views of Pukeatua mountain from the hub windows. For Charla, these landmarks are a daily reminder of the connection between place, people and whakapapa. "I feel very privileged to carry out this mahi in Te Awakairangi," she says.

Equity at the centre

Not everyone begins their cancer journey from the same place, and Charla keeps this at the front of everything she does. Guided by the Cancer Society Equity Charter, she works to make sure services are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the diverse needs of our communities. She is committed to upholding the mana of the people we support, strengthening whānau wellbeing and addressing the barriers that lead to inequitable outcomes, particularly for Māori and others who experience inequities in our health system.

"Equity is an essential part of cancer support," Charla says. "It's about working to ensure that everyone has a fair opportunity to access the care and support that they need to help them reach a state of mauri ora."

More than leading a team

Charla's role extends well beyond the Hutt Hub. A big part of her mahi is building and strengthening relationships with whānau, health providers, iwi, and Māori and non-Māori community organisations.

By working alongside them, she helps remove barriers, strengthen connections, and support people to navigate the complexities of cancer with dignity and confidence.

The best part of the job, she says, is leading a team that genuinely cares about its community and works together to provide meaningful support.

A few quick questions
for Charla

Favourite café in the Hutt Valley?

Sweet Vanilla Kitchen, right on Pretoria Street and a short walk from the Hub. It has a great range of gluten-free, keto and vegan options, and Charla highly recommends the ginger slice: "he tino reka!"

What gets you through a busy day?

Remembering her why. "Knowing that the mahi we do here at the Cancer Society has purpose and can help make one's cancer journey that little bit easier. That's the stuff that fills my cup."

One word to describe the Cancer Society?

Manaakitanga, because it captures the heart of our mahi: caring for and supporting individuals and whānau throughout their cancer journey.

Keen to connect with the Hutt Hub?

Address Level 2 / 20 Pretoria Street, Lower Hutt, 5010
Email HuttHub@cancersoc.org.nz
Call 0800 226 237



Volunteers recognised nationally

Cancer Society were one of five finalists in the Volunteer Programme of the Year category at NZ Volunteering Awards 2026. The criteria focuses on impact and engagement of volunteer programmes.

"Every nomination we received told a story of people who give their time with real care, and of leaders who make sure that time is well supported and well recognised. These finalists show what best practice in volunteer engagement looks like on the ground, from structured onboarding and training to recognition that comes from volunteers themselves. They are an inspiration to the whole sector, and they show why volunteer management deserves to be recognised as a profession."

Michelle Kitney, Chief Executive of Volunteering New Zealand

In recognising Cancer Society as finalists, Volunteering New Zealand noted that Cancer Society has about 20 times the number of volunteers as paid staff, adding up to nearly 130,000 hours of volunteer contribution over a year.

Thank you to Tūao Aotearoa Volunteering New Zealand for shortlisting Cancer Society and to Rosterfy for sponsoring the award.

"I've been a volunteer driver for a while now. I see myself as part of the Cancer Society's amazing support framework for people undergoing treatment for cancer. My passengers are invariably grateful and, I'm sure, relieved, to have the driving to appointments and the parking taken off their hands. As I see it, they have more than enough on their minds and I like to think I lighten that load. I hear stories of such courage, endurance and determination. It's a privilege to be able to help in this small way."

Bill Gebbie

Right top: Cancer Society federation Volunteer Leaders.
Right bottom: Cancer Society Volunteer Driver, Bill Gebbie.

Keen to find out more about how you can get involved?

Head to cancer.org.nz/get-involved/volunteer/ or email volunteering@cancersoc.org.nz





Thank you, Bill, and all our volunteers, for your invaluable support. We simply couldn't offer this crucial service without our team of volunteer drivers.





Top left: Volunteer collectors in Newlands.
Top right: Cancer Society staff at the Queensgate collection site.
Bottom left: Upper Hutt community coodinators on Daffodil Day.
Bottom middle: Summerset on The Landing's fundraising bake sale event.
Bottom right: Vlad, owner of The Hub Social in Trentham, supporting his 10th Daffodil Day.







Daffodil Day: You helped hope bloom

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our donors, volunteers, supporters and partners, our Daffodil Day Street Appeal on the last week of August raised an amazing $190,000 for Cancer Society Wellington. Every dollar helps us support the 1 in 3 New Zealanders who will get cancer in their lifetime.

The community support was a real highlight, with schools, workplaces and community groups getting behind Daffodil Day by running their own fundraisers throughout August. There was a Daffodil Dancefloor, bake sales, dress up days, and the Daffodil Express train to Carterton, while our Daffy Dippers fundraised by braving the chilly conditions and going for a winter dip! A special shout out to Vintage Car Club for their fundraising effort at the annual Daffodil Day Motor Show.

Our fresh daffodil bunches also proved popular. Thanks to 17 wonderful volunteer drivers, 415 bunches were delivered across the region, bringing a little sunshine to homes and workplaces.

Online, we had some fantastic collaborations with Te Nukuao Wellington Zoo, Wellington Cable Car, Ventana with Wellington Airport and Wellington Botanic Gardens.

A vital part of our Daffodil Day campaign was the incredible mahi of our major sponsor, ANZ. Their support was visible right across Wellington, with ANZ Wellington staff getting involved at every chance, from street collections and bake sales to a special morning tea for the Oncology Ward at Wellington Hospital, a Cultural Night fundraiser and more.

Ngā mihi nui to everyone who donated, volunteered, fundraised, shared our campaign or simply wore a daffodil.

What's coming up in **our events calendar**

Marathon in a Month

Marathon in a Month is your challenge, your way. Walk it, run it, cycle it, or swim it. Whether you're lacing up for your first 42km or chasing three or four marathons, you set the distance that suits (and stretches!) you.

Every step, pedal and stroke helps the Cancer Society Wellington Division deliver vital services to cancer patients and their whānau.

Find out more at
marathoninamonth.org.nz

The Longest Day Golf Challenge

Think you've got the stamina? The Longest Day Golf Challenge is back for summer 2026/27, and we're after golfers of all abilities. Play 72 holes (four rounds) or 36 holes, all in a single day.

Pick your course, pick your date anywhere in December or January, and rope in a few mates to share the load. Every dollar raised supports people with cancer in the Wellington region.

Sign up now at
longestday.org.nz

Round the Bays 2027

We are proud to announce that the Cancer Society is the official Charity Partner for Round the Bays 2027!

Round the Bays is all about coming together, having a great day and getting behind great causes. When you enter, you can choose to fundraise for the Cancer Society. Mark your calendars for Sunday 14 February 2027, when Round the Bays Wellington takes over the waterfront.

Get involved at
roundthebays.co.nz/wellington







See you there!



Stay SunSmart this summer

With the warmer weather arriving, it's a great time to refresh our SunSmart habits. Remember to check the daily UV levels, apply sunscreen regularly, wear a hat and sunglasses where appropriate, and make use of shade when spending time outdoors. A little preparation goes a long way in protecting yourself while enjoying the sunshine.



in memory

for a cancer free future

Give in memory of your loved one to help ease the heartbreak of cancer.

Donate In-Memory at
www.inmemory.org.nz

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Recognising success

We send out a regular Cancer Services Survey to those that use our wide range of support offerings, from counselling to transport, accommodation and one-on-one support.

The results this quarter were heartening, with an overall rating of 4.8/5. Here is what some of our clients had to say:

★★★★★

Accommodation

"Loved that it was close to the hospital, so we didn't need to travel to appointments every day. The staff were so lovely as well, and extremely helpful and caring."

Counselling

"My counsellor was excellent. She was easy to talk to and offered great advice when I asked for it."

Case Management

"You guys have been amazing, all the support I've gotten has been incredible and has helped me get through this tough chapter, keep doing the amazing work you do."

Thank you to our local Cancer Services team for providing compassionate care for cancer patients and their whānau as they navigate the difficult process of a cancer diagnosis.

Wellington Driving Service **Year in Numbers**

Key Stats 2025 - 2026

213,036
kilometres driven by Cancer Society Volunteers

3,008
trips taken to get patients to their appointments

253
volunteer drivers

CC#10067

Cancer Society Wellington
52 Riddiford Street, Newtown, Wellington 6021
Offices in Hutt Valley, Kāpiti & Porirua
PO Box 7125, Newtown, Wellington 6242

Cancer Information and Service enquiries:
E info@cancersoc.org.nz
T 0800 CANCER (226 237)

Donation enquiries:
E fundraising@cancersoc.org.nz
T 0800 467 345

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cancer.org.nz