

## CareWorks' Employee Wellness Programme

# *Cancer Awareness in the Workplace: What Every South African Employee Should Know*

---

### Understanding Cancer: A South African Perspective

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death globally—and South Africa is no exception. With more than **100,000 new cancer cases** reported annually in the country, it's crucial for employees to be informed, proactive, and supported when it comes to cancer prevention and early detection.

While cancer can affect anyone, regardless of age or background, many types of cancer are **highly treatable** if caught early. Through education and support, workplaces can play a vital role in reducing the cancer burden.

---

### What Is Cancer?

Cancer is a disease where some of the body's cells grow uncontrollably and spread to other parts of the body. These abnormal cells can form a lump or mass (called a tumour) and may disrupt how organs function.

There are over **200 different types of cancer**, but some of the most common in South Africa include:

- **Breast cancer** (especially in women)
  - **Prostate cancer** (especially in men)
  - **Cervical cancer**
  - **Colorectal (colon) cancer**
  - **Lung cancer**
  - **Skin cancer (melanoma and non-melanoma)**
- 

### Key Risk Factors

While anyone can develop cancer, certain **lifestyle and environmental factors** increase risk:

- **Smoking and alcohol use**
- **Poor diet and obesity**
- **Lack of physical activity**
- **Exposure to harmful chemicals or the sun**

- **HPV and other infections**
- **Family history of cancer**

Understanding these risks is the first step toward prevention.

---

### **Signs and Symptoms to Watch For**

Early detection saves lives. While symptoms vary by cancer type, some general signs include:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Persistent fatigue
- Unusual lumps or swellings
- Persistent cough or difficulty breathing
- Changes in skin (moles, lesions)
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits

If you notice any of these, speak to your doctor or visit your local clinic.

---

### **Cancer in the South African Workplace**

According to the **Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA)**, cancer is increasingly affecting people of working age. This can lead to loss of income, productivity, and emotional stress—both for the employee and their colleagues.

A supportive work environment that encourages **regular screening, open dialogue, and mental health support** can make a real difference.

---

### **How Employers and Employees Can Take Action**

Here are a few ways companies and individuals can make a positive impact:

#### **For Employers:**

- Offer **on-site screening days** in partnership with health providers.
- Provide **flexible leave policies** for treatment or caregiving.
- Educate employees through **wellness workshops or webinars**.
- Encourage a smoke-free and active workplace culture.

#### **For Employees:**

- Attend annual screenings (especially for breast, prostate, and cervical cancer).
- Take part in wellness events and cancer awareness campaigns.

- Adopt a healthier lifestyle—eat well, move more, limit alcohol, and avoid tobacco.
  - Support colleagues undergoing treatment by fostering a compassionate work culture.
- 

#### **Free or Low-Cost Screening Resources in South Africa**

- **CANSA:** Offers mobile health clinics, screenings, and education. [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za)
  - **Department of Health:** Provides public health services including HPV vaccinations and pap smears.
  - **PinkDrive:** Focuses on breast cancer education and mobile mammograms. [www.pinkdrive.co.za](http://www.pinkdrive.co.za)
- 

#### **Final Word**

Cancer is not just a personal issue—it's a workplace issue, too. With early detection and the right support, survival rates are improving every year. Let's work together to build a culture of care, awareness, and action.

**Your health is your wealth. Don't wait—screen today.**

---