

Poor brain cancer survival outcomes on the rise

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Researchers Dr Alexandra Farrall and Professor Justine Smith at the Flinders Medical Centre. Credit: Flinders University

A first-of-its-kind Australian study has revealed rates of brain lymphoma have quadrupled since the 1980s with only 33% of people surviving five years after receiving a diagnosis.

Brain lymphoma is a non-Hodgkin lymphoma in which [cancer cells](#) from lymph tissue form in the brain or spinal cord. As the [human eye](#) is connected to the brain, the lymphoma can also start in the eye (retinal lymphoma) and later spread to the brain.

First author of the study published in the journal *Cancers*, Dr. Alexandra Farrall at Flinders University, says the results showed increasing [brain cancer](#) rates in both elderly and younger Australian adults, and much lower survival outcomes than those reported for lymphoma that occurs outside the brain.

"Our study provides the first Australian population analysis of the incidence and survival of brain lymphoma, which indicates that while this type of cancer is rare, Australians aged 40 to 49 are increasingly diagnosed."

"We calculated survival outcomes for patients and found no difference between genders but did find worsening outcomes with advancing age at time of diagnosis. There has been improvement in survival over the years, associated with advances in treatments."

Brain lymphoma was recently in global news headlines when Doug Scott, a mountaineering legend and the first Englishman to climb Mount Everest, died at the age of 79 after a battle with this brain cancer.

Flinders University Strategic Professor in Eye & Vision Health and senior author of the paper, Professor Justine Smith, says it's the first time a study has assessed comprehensive data on [brain lymphoma](#) diagnosis and survival rates across a span of three decades in Australia.

"The increase in cancer that we have reported cannot be explained on the basis of an aging population or improved diagnostic and classification tools, and this finding definitely deserves more investigation."

"While it is fortunate that this cancer is rare, being diagnosed with a rare disease poses many challenges for the patient, their support network and the health care team, as treatment information is often more limited."

More information: Alexandra L. Farrall et al. Changing Incidence and Survival of Primary Central Nervous System Lymphoma in Australia: A 33-Year National Population-Based Study, *Cancers* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/cancers13030403](https://doi.org/10.3390/cancers13030403)

Provided by Flinders University

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