



# **The SAGE Encyclopedia of Cancer and Society**

## **Cameroon**

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Book Title: The SAGE Encyclopedia of Cancer and Society

Chapter Title: "Cameroon"

Pub. Date: 2015

Access Date: December 29, 2016

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: Thousand Oaks,

Print ISBN: 9781483345734

Online ISBN: 9781483345758

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483345758.n105>

Print pages: 205-206

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The central African country of Cameroon is geographically located on the Gulf of Guinea, bordered by Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. As with many African countries, it has a history of colonization that is still evident in the 21st century. Cameroon was first colonized by the Portuguese in 1520, who established sugar plantations and began the slave trade; they were succeeded by the Dutch in the 1600s, followed by the Germans in 1884, then the British and French in about 1916. Current reports estimate the population of Cameroon at 24 million.

Cameroon has an estimated 250 ethnolinguistic groups and five major cultural groups spread across the region. This ethnic and cultural diversity influences the behavior patterns and perceptions related to seeking treatment for cancer and other diseases. As a result of colonization, the country is underdeveloped, and many of its indigenous citizenry living in rural areas are impoverished and undereducated, which adds to the country's public health crisis.

## Public Health

Cameroon faces the double burden of challenges from communicable diseases such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, malaria, tuberculosis, and noncommunicable diseases such as cancer. Adults and children are plagued by a variety of cancer types that include breast and cervical cancers for women, prostate and liver cancers for men, and Hodgkin's and Burkitt lymphomas and leukemia in children. This combination of high rates of communicable and noncommunicable diseases in the same population creates an additional burden on already limited human and financial resources to remedy the problem. The high rate of tobacco use is also a major contributor to cancer rates.

Overall cancer is the second-leading cause of death in developing countries. In Cameroon, cancer accounts for 3 percent of all deaths from all ages annually, and the risk for both males and females prior to the age of 75 is 11 percent. Cameroon cancer statistics are generally unavailable at both national and institutional levels as there is no countrywide cancer registry; therefore, the numbers related to incidence rate and mortality are tracked infrequently and considered low.

Cameroon has two major government-run hospitals, Yaoundé General Hospital and Douala General Hospital, both of which have cancer centers with limited resources of equipment, medication, and staff. However, access to quality health services are beyond the reach of some of the primary victims of cancer in Cameroon who are more likely to be poor and have limited access to available health services due to provider location and the high cost of diagnosis and treatment.

## National Cancer Control Plan

Cancer is recognized as a public health problem in Cameroon, and as such, Cameroon's Ministry of Public Health established the National Cancer Control Committee (NCCC) and subsequently its National Cancer Control Plan (NCCP), which was initiated with the help of Dr. Anderson S. Doh, other citizens, and allies concerned with the growing cancer crisis in Cameroon. First published in 2004, this version of the cancer control plan was created with the assistance of the World Health Organization (WHO), American Cancer Society (ACS), International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and the International Atomic Energy

Agency (IAEA), among others.

According to NCCC officials, the cost of health services is beyond the means of the average Cameroonian. In addition to financial barriers, the NCCP details the following challenges to the growing cancer burden in Cameroon: cultural beliefs and myths regarding cancer, systemic poverty, and the fact that many cancer patients seek medical assistance only after the disease has reached an advanced stage. Other challenges are related to the role of traditional healers and some health workers treating the disease without proper training and necessary medical resources.

In June of 2013, an assessment of Cameroon's cancer control measures was completed by the IAEA, which identified areas of continued concern for the NCCP and offered suggestions for improvement.

### **The Role of Missions and Nonprofit Organizations**

Although cancer treatment facilities are few relative to the population, one source of major support in the burgeoning cancer pandemic comes from the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Board, which provides free health care to rural populations of subsistence farmers and their families. Missionaries and medical professionals run clinics at the following hospitals: Bango Baptist Hospital, Northwest Province; Mbingo Baptist Hospital, Northwest Province; and Mutengene, Southwest province, along with their partners Stellenbosch University, Tygerberg Children's Hospital, South Africa; and Beryl Thyer Memorial Africa Trust. They assist with cancer diagnosis and treatment along with other public health concerns.

In 2013, the Medical Mission of Hope was organized by two U.S.-based international organizations, the African Women's Cancer Awareness Association, and the Michael and Mauritia Patcha Foundation and sought to provide professional medical services to those residing in the remote southwest region of Cameroon. A diverse pool of medical and nonmedical professionals from the United States and Cameroon contributed the human resources necessary to screen, diagnose, and treat breast, cervical, and prostate cancers. In addition to providing patient health education and awareness and medical training related to the current trends in cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment, and palliative care were provided to early career nurses, doctors, clinicians, and other allied health professionals.

With the growing number of cancer cases in Cameroon expected to surpass 20,000 per year by 2030, cancer prevention and detection in Cameroon has taken on a multifaceted and multi-institutional design that includes structural policy and fiscal changes, community advocacy, education, and individual behavioral change strategies. Key components to the success of prevention and detection are government subsidies and assistance from national and international philanthropic organizations. It is necessary for a developing country such as Cameroon to combat cancer through educational programs, diagnosis, and treatment.

**See Also:** [AIDS-Related Cancers](#); [Anticancer Drugs](#).

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483345758.n105>

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### **Further Readings**

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