CANCER UNITED

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Beyond Treatment: How Community Cancer Support Improves Life After Cancer

Survey data from 89 people living with and beyond cancer demonstrates the substantial emotional, social, and physical impact of community-based support services.

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BACKGROUND – WHY THIS MATTERS

As cancer survival continues to improve, increasing numbers of people are living with the long-term physical, emotional, and social consequences of cancer and its treatment.
While healthcare services focus on diagnosis and treatment, many survivorship needs remain unmet.
This study, carried out by CANCER UNITED, explores how a community-based cancer support charity can help address these gaps and improve quality of life for people living with and beyond cancer.

STUDY DESIGN

Between September 2024 and February 2025, a cross-sectional member survey was conducted at CANCER UNITED. 89 respondents equating to nearly 25% of the total CU membership participated, with multiple cancer types being represented. Respondents were asked questions about:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Physical health
- Social support
- Healthcare experiences
- Rehabilitation awareness
- Impact of CANCER UNITED

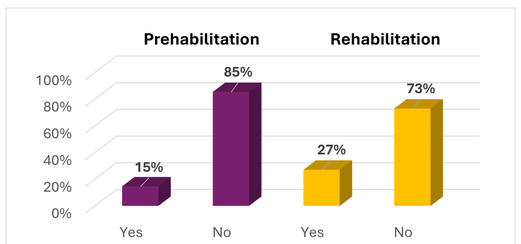
METHODOLOGY

- Anonymous participant IDs
- Likert and binary scale responses
- Qualitative comments option

KEY FINDINGS

GAPS IN CANCER SUPPORT

Major Pre- and Rehabilitation Gap



Only **15%** were aware of prehabilitation and **27%** of rehabilitation services.

85% had no awareness of prehabilitation
73% had no awareness of rehabilitation

Diagnosis and GP Support

- **74%** received prompt diagnosis
- BUT only **38%** reported meaningful GP involvement
- Limited follow-up support from primary care was reported

IMPACT OF CANCER ON DAILY LIFE

Emotional and Physical Burden

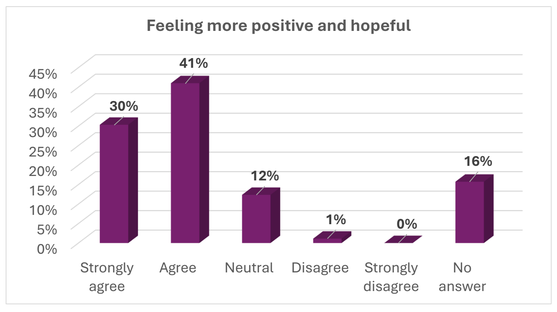
- **77%** said coping with treatment affected personal life
- **65%** struggled with fatigue
- **69%** struggled with treatment side effects
- **54%** reported stress significantly affected daily life
- Many described feelings of isolation despite family support

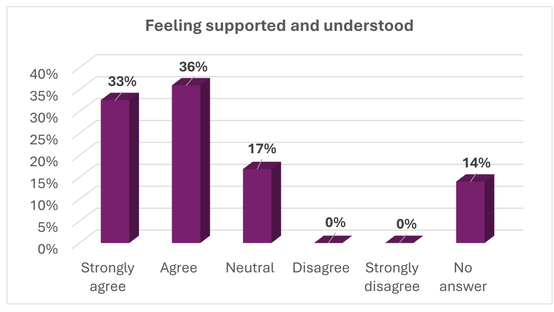
Respondent quotes:
"I felt like a rollercoaster."
"I did not want to accept I had cancer."
"I thought Why me? What's next?"

IMPACT OF CANCER UNITED

Emotional Impact

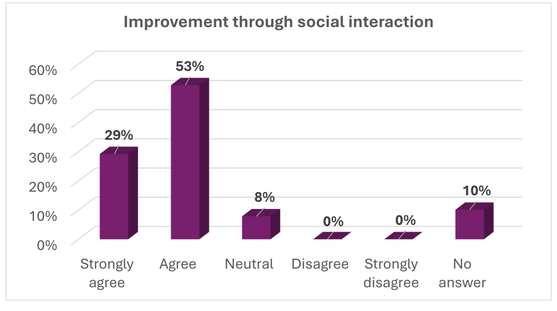
- **71%** became more positive and hopeful
- **69%** felt more supported and understood
- Members reported improved coping with stress and anxiety





Social Impact

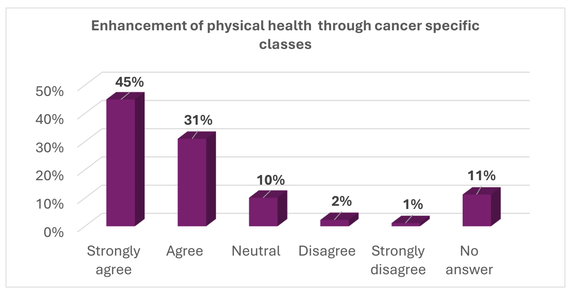
- **82%** valued friendships/community
- **76%** benefited from peer sharing
- Members reported reduced isolation and increased confidence



Respondent Quotes:
"My life was given a purpose."
"I have a more positive attitude and focus on what I can do."
"There is a cohort of people in the same situation sharing experience."

Physical Impact

- **74%** improved physical health through support/resources
- **76%** benefited from cancer-specific classes
- **96%** of CU FITTER™ users improved fitness/wellbeing



Respondent Quote:
"CU FITTER™ was a game changer."

MODEL OF IMPACT

CANCER UNITED Services
- Exercise Programmes
- Choir
- Peer Connection
- Support Groups
- Social Events

→

Increased Connections
- Reduced Isolation
- Shared Experience
- Emotional Support

→

Improved Outcomes
- Confidence
- Hope
- Fitness
- Resilience
- Quality of Life

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that while cancer treatment pathways generally functioned effectively from a medical perspective, many participants experienced unmet emotional, rehabilitative, and survivorship needs.
CANCER UNITED provides an important complementary community-based support system alongside formal healthcare services.
The strongest reported benefits related to:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Peer support
- Social connection
- Cancer-specific exercise
- Increased confidence and resilience

The findings also highlight a substantial lack of awareness regarding prehabilitation and rehabilitation services.

CONCLUSION

CANCER UNITED delivers meaningful emotional, social, and physical benefits for people living with and beyond cancer.
This survey demonstrates that community cancer charities can play a vital role in survivorship care by:

- Reducing isolation
- Improving emotional wellbeing
- Supporting physical recovery
- Enhancing quality of life

Greater integration between healthcare services, rehabilitation pathways, and community cancer-support organisations may improve long-term outcomes for cancer patients.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Expand awareness of pre- and rehabilitation
- Strengthen GP and primary-care referral pathways
- Develop formal NHS-charity partnerships
- Develop strong industry partnerships through CU IN BUSINESS™ programme
- Expand social prescribing into cancer survivorship
- Continue annual longitudinal impact evaluation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank all CANCER UNITED members who participated in the survey and shared their experiences.

LITERATURE

Catt, S., Sheward, J., Sheward, E. *et al*. Cancer survivors' experiences of a community-based cancer-specific exercise programme: results of an exploratory survey. *Support Care Cancer* 26, 3209–3216 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-018-4179-0

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