

Study: Nevadans more likely to get cancer than neighboring states

By AP

Nevadans are more likely than residents of three neighboring states to contract and die of cancer, according to a study.

The report, released by the UNLV and Nevada State Health Division last week, notes cancer rates in the region comprising Nevada, California, Utah and Arizona historically have been lower than the national average.

But Nevada showed significantly higher rates of all cancers than those other states between 2006 and 2008, according to the report. Nevada had a cancer incident rate of 457 per 100,000 people, compared with 442 for California, 397 for Utah and 394 for Arizona.

The Silver State also had a higher cancer mortality rate during the same period, with 182 deaths per 100,000 compared with California's 162, Utah's 128 and Arizona's 152.

Dr. Paulo Pinheiro, a UNLV researcher and epidemiologist, argues in the report that Nevada suffers from a lack of screening and less specialized expertise, which forces nearly 10 percent of cancer patients to be diagnosed or treated outside of the state.

The exodus of cancer patients has a major impact on patients' quality of life, he said, and has a negative financial impact on state health care providers and private insurance companies.

The report features a comprehensive analysis of all cancer cases in Nevada from 2006 to 2008, and relies on data from the

Nevada Central Cancer Registry. Nevada had an annual average of 11,209 new cases of cancer over that period.

The report also found “alarming disparities” in the level and quality of care between northern and southern Nevada.

For instance, survival rates for breast cancer in northern Nevada are about 82 percent after four years, which is roughly the national average. In southern Nevada, survival rates are nearly 10 percentage points lower.

“If you are residents of a state you would expect the same level of care anywhere in that state, but this is not happening in Nevada,” Pinheiro said. “This discrepancy does not exist in other states around the nation and points to major differences in access to screening as well as quality health care between the two regions.”

Pinheiro suggests Nevada boost prevention efforts to curb cancer rates.

“An increase in the screening rates especially for those of low incomes, as well as strengthening the interventions to reduce tobacco use and second-hand smoke, could go a long way toward diminishing the cancer risk in Nevada,” he said.