Reviewer's report

Title: Cancer survival for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: a national study of survival rates and excess mortality.

Version: 1 Date: 8 September 2013

Reviewer: Alison Venn

Reviewer's report:

This is a very well-written paper that advances understanding of cancer survival in Indigenous Australians and makes comparisons with the non-Indigenous population. The authors recognise the limitations of available population cancer data and describe these thoroughly. Their methods and analytic approaches are appropriate and well justified. The results are clearly presented. The findings have important implications for cancer control and health services for Indigenous Australians and also illustrate the need for improvement in recording Indigenous status in Australian population statistics.

Minor essential revisions

1. For consistency it would be helpful to see the number of cases of each cancer site/type for non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous Australians in Table 2.
2. The discussion and conclusions in the paper are thorough and well justified. The first sentence of the conclusion in the abstract, however, focusses on findings from other studies rather than those arising from this work. Mention in the abstract's conclusion of the importance of improving indigenous status reporting in Australian population statistics might be more appropriate.

Discretionary revisions

1. The finding that improvements in cancer survival in non-Indigenous Australians have been substantially greater than in Indigenous Australians is very important. The paper might be strengthened with a fuller description of this trend over time, for example by graphically representing survival for each population group by year of cancer diagnosis, or groups of years within the 1991-2005 time period.
2. Have the changes in survival over time differed by remoteness?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
As Director of the Tasmanian Cancer Registry, I provide cancer statistics to the National Cancer Statistics Clearing House from where the data for this paper were obtained. Several of the authors are known to me but I have had no knowledge of this paper and no role in its development. I have no financial or non-financial competing interests.