Breast cancer is by far the most frequently diagnosed cancer and cause of cancer death among women worldwide.

Although the estimated number of breast cancer deaths is less than a third of estimated new cases, breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer death in women in less-developed countries, and the second among women in developed countries.

Breast cancer incidence rates continue to increase in all countries except a few high-income countries, while mortality rates are decreasing in many high-income countries and increasing in low- and middle-income countries.

There were an estimated 1.7 million new cases (25% of all cancers in women) and 0.5 million cancer deaths (15% of all cancer deaths in women) in 2012.

The variation in mortality rates between world regions (ranging from 6 per 100,000 in Eastern Asia to 20 per 100,000 in Western Africa) is less than that for incidence rates because of the considerably better survival from breast cancer in developed regions, resulting from increased access to early detection (mammography) and treatment. Differences in incidence between countries with and without mammography screening programs are also influenced by earlier diagnosis and the overdiagnosis associated with detecting breast cancers in asymptomatic women. Overall, a substantially greater proportion of women with breast cancer will die from their disease in less-developed regions.

"People used to say everyone knows someone who has had breast cancer. I don't hear that any more. Everyone has someone close to them who has had breast cancer."