



Sharing the latest news from the AWACAN-ED programme

Hello and welcome to the final AWACAN-ED Newsletter. Since our last newsletter in October 2025, we have been very busy and we hope you enjoy the updates below on our Research and Capacity development activities and that you visit our website to view and download the Toolkits we developed.

AWACAN-ED is an NIHR-funded Global Health Research Group that builds on the previous African Women Awareness of CANcer (AWACAN) project and was funded from October 2021 to August 2026. The team included a multidisciplinary group of researchers from South Africa, Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom working together with collaborators to improve care-seeking and address barriers to early cancer diagnosis in Southern Africa. The programme focused on cervical and breast cancer in women and colorectal cancer in both men and women.



Programme Update

This newsletter marks the end of the funded research programme on 31st August 2026, but dissemination activities will continue to communicate our findings and increase the impact of the research.

Publications News

We are delighted to report that six papers reporting on findings from our AWACAN-ED programme have been published since the last newsletter.

Two papers from Workstream 1 reporting on key findings from the Cross-Sectional Survey and Health Facility Assessment:

- 'Time to diagnosis for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer in Zimbabwe and South Africa: a cross-sectional study', J. Moodley *et al.* Published in **BMJ Global Health** gh.bmj.com/content/11/2/e021889
- 'Health facility preparedness for early detection of symptomatic cancer in Southern Africa: A multi-centre cross-sectional study', T. Ras *et al.* Published in **PLOS Global Public Health** journals.plos.org/globalpublichealth/article?id=10.1371/journal.pgph.0004825

Also, the protocol paper for the Public Toolkit community trial in Workstream 3:

- 'Randomised controlled community trial assessing efficacy of the AWACAN-ED public toolkit to improve cancer symptom awareness and intention to seek help in South Africa and Zimbabwe: study protocol', S.E. Scott *et al.* Published in **BMJ Open** bmjopen.bmj.com/content/16/1/e106400

Additionally, three papers written by our AWACAN-ED scholars:

- 'Emergency presentation of colorectal cancer in Africa: a scoping review', S. Chinyowa *et al.* Published in **BMJ Open** bmjopen.bmj.com/content/16/1/e110931
- 'Treatment cost of colon cancer at a South African tertiary academic hospital', K. Nnene *et al.* Published in the **Journal of Cancer Policy** www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2213538326000251?via%3Dihub
- 'Financial risk protection and distress financing for cervical cancer treatment in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review', D Okova *et al.* Published in **ecancermedicalsecience** ecancer.org/en/journal/article/2191-financial-risk-protection-and-distress-financing-for-cervical-cancer-treatment-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-a-systematic-review

Further papers reporting on further key findings from Workstream 1 and the evaluations of our AWACAN-ED toolkits in Workstream 3 are being written.

AWACAN-ED Toolkits

Two toolkits were developed in Workstream 2 which underwent evaluation in urban and rural settings in South Africa and Zimbabwe in Workstream 3:

- Public toolkit for symptom appraisal and help-seeking
- Primary care provider toolkit for symptom assessment and management

Study data collection for the evaluation completed in January 2026 and the analyses are close to completion. This has involved a huge effort from the team, with additional resource recruited in Zimbabwe and the UK to accelerate the analysis period to enable results before the end of the funded programme.

Several publications will be produced to share the findings, alongside further dissemination through conference presentations as well as meetings and workshops with key stakeholders in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The toolkits are now available for download via the AWACAN-ED website
awacan.online/awacan-ed-toolkits/.

Dissemination

Dissemination activities started with the team delivering a two-hour session at AORTIC 2025 in Tunisia in November titled: 'Insights from the African aWAREness of CANcer and Early Diagnosis (AWACAN-ED) programme'. This gave an overview of the programme, presented the key findings to date and included a panel discussion reflecting on the implications of the findings.



Read a blog about the team's experiences at AORTIC 2025 here:

awacan.online/news/report-from-the-15th-aortic-international-conference-on-cancer-in-africa/

Earlier this summer, a dissemination event was held in Cape Town on 13th May 2026. The event was attended by 64 key invited South African stakeholders and focused on the South African component of the programme. It featured presentations of the key findings and outcomes, followed by a moderated panel discussion with experts and key stakeholders reflecting on the implications of the findings for research, policy, and practice. The event was very well received and has prompted requests for further meetings to explore the findings in more depth and consider incorporating toolkit information into the national PAC guidelines.



In August, dissemination sessions were held at the following events:

- South African Rural Health & Family Physicians Joint Congress, August 2026
- Zimbabwe Medical Association (ZiMA) Conference, August 2026

Other key conferences for dissemination in 2026 include:

- World Congress on Public Health, Cape Town, September 2026
- World Cancer Congress, Hong Kong, September 2026
- Asian Pacific Organization for Cancer Prevention (APOCP), September 2026

... and in 2027 Ca-PRI, WONCA World and AORTIC.

Our students will also be presenting their research findings at a number of conferences in 2026 and 2027.

Capacity Development Update

Congratulations to Belinda Mutibura, one of our Masters Scholars in Zimbabwe, who completed her MMED (Obstetrics and Gynaecology) with Credit.

Our two PhD students and three additional Masters students are making great progress and will complete this year.

In May we held the 4th AWACAN-ED Southern African School for Cancer Research in Cape Town. This brought together the AWACAN-ED team with our Scholars and other researchers from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Libya. The event was a great success and celebrated the journey and development of all attendees into confident researchers ready to take the next steps in their careers.



The programme for the School included updates on the development and evaluation of the AWACAN-ED Public and Primary Care Provider toolkits and involved our South African experts in community engagement from CANSA and UMTA in the teaching sessions.

Some of our attendees shared their reflections of the AWACAN-ED School and its impact on them and you can read them here:

- awacan.online/news/finding-my-place-in-the-puzzle-reflections-on-the-awacan-ed-cancer-research-school
- awacan.online/news/finding-my-voice-in-cancer-research-lessons-from-the-awacan-ed-research-schools/
- awacan.online/news/beyond-the-clinic-reflections-from-the-awacan-ed-southern-africa-school-for-cancer-research/
- awacan.online/news/from-masters-student-to-research-team-member-what-awacan-ed-has-enabled-for-me/

Visit our website www.awacan.online and follow us on Instagram (AWACANED)

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