



Hope and respite  
on a razor's edge

## Description

**Leucan's Shaved Head Challenge turned 15 this year and to mark this milestone, the organization hopes to set a series of records to further ease cancer's burden.**

**By Caroline Arbour**

Every year, 300 families in Quebec are hit with shattering news: cancer has stricken one of their own, a child. Shock is paired with disbelief.

"We think a child should play in a park, not in a hospital activity room," says Camille Rioux, a philanthropic development officer with Leucan. "And death at a young age seems inconceivable."

The fight against cancer, which can be long and recurrent, spares no member of the family and it is to help each other through the ordeal that parents founded the organization 37 years ago. In the early years, Leucan did not have sufficient financial means to offer adequate, quality support services to its members. But then a benefactor came along.

"I saw people very, very close to me lose their child to cancer," said Granby business owner Serge Tremblay earlier this year, when he was nominated for Radio-Canada and Manuvie's Gens de coeur volunteerism award — which he won. "I do not want to forget them and every day I try to think of them."

Tremblay made it his mission to fill Leucan's coffers. In the spring of 2001, he put a price on his head, shaving it for donations. And he got friends to do the same. Over the course of three weeks, their grassroots awareness





Leucan's most significant fundraising activity. Close to 80,000 Quebecers have gone under the electric razor since Tremblay started the ball rolling to raise millions of dollars. And to show boys and girls who have seen chemotherapy claim their hair that bald is beautiful. Father-son and mother-daughter duos, entire families, groups of friends, work colleagues, and even children as young as seven years old — some have even, eagerly or gingerly, sat in hair styling chairs on stages across the province or done the challenge at home more than once. At least one person has taken part in each of the 15 editions.

Recently, "a teenager told us that she participated to send the message that what matters in life is inner strength, not a person's appearance," reports Camille Rioux. Although many would agree, not everyone feels at ease parting with their locks, even for a worthwhile cause. Statistics show women sign up in fewer numbers. Camille Rioux may work for Leucan, but she has not yet taken the plunge. "Some people need time to consider it. Take my sister-in-law, for example. Her mother had cancer, she thought about it for five years before deciding this was going to be the year."

### **A Guinness World Record**

She picked a good year to take the challenge, lending a hand in Leucan's quest to establish as many records as possible during this 15th anniversary edition. ([records.tetesrasees.com/splash/en/](https://records.tetesrasees.com/splash/en/)) Confirmation is still pending, but Quebecers may have already beat the Guinness World Record for the most heads shaved for a cause in four hours on May 24, with the tally at 1,000. Other precedents could be set in the two weeks left to the event, like surpassing the five million dollar mark in donations — a sum that represents almost half of Leucan's annual revenue.

Two thirds of that money is spent providing an array of services to members, for life, from the moment of diagnosis. They include counseling with oncology social workers, massage therapy, and recreational programs such as a one-week summer camp that gives families the opportunity to meet others who share their struggle, while having fun and bonding outdoors.

Another 14% is given directly to parents in the form of monetary aid to relieve some of the financial stress they may experience, especially if they live far from treatment centres. Camille Rioux says the grants are much appreciated. In the case of a job loss, "a parent feels he or she can focus more on the child's health and less on financial concerns."

The remaining 20% goes to research on pediatric cancers, the most common of which are leukemia, brain and nervous system cancers, and lymphomas. Over the last twenty years, the number of children diagnosed has neither increased, nor decreased, but thanks to scientific progress, more young patients manage to beat the disease. Survival rates have improved from 71% to approximately 82%, which raises the hope that someday, cancer will be cured.

### **Local challenge nearby on September 17th, at Alexis Nihon shopping centre**

Alexis Nihon shopping centre will host its first-ever Shaved Head Challenge on September 17, from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. on the metro level. It is the 2015 edition's penultimate public shaving event. A minimum donation of \$50 is required and participants are encouraged to sign up online ahead of time at [tetesrasees.com/en](https://tetesrasees.com/en). Alexis Nihon is owned and managed by real estate investment fund FPI Cominar, whose headquarters hosted and helped make a number of editions of the Leucan Shaved Head Challenge possible in Quebec City. The company continues to support the cause and encourages its employees to get involved with the event.

*Images: Thibault Carron*

### **Category**

1. Community Events



## Tags

1. cancer
2. children
3. fund raising

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