

Cancer Patients Still Face COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Health Care Delays

1 in 3 report that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their access to care more than a year after it began.

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Cancer patients and survivors continue to deal with the negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic on their ability to access necessary health care.

According to a new Survivor Views survey from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), 1 in 3 (35%) cancer patients and survivors report that the pandemic has affected their ability to access care. Even during the last few months, as the overall spread of the virus has begun to decline due to vaccinations, roughly 1 in 6 (16%) patients report a delay or interruption in their cancer screening schedule, including 1 in 10 (11%) who experienced a screening delay for a cancer with which they'd previously been diagnosed. These delays were driven mostly by logistical issues such as staffing shortages or a lack of available appointments (26%), followed by patients' concerns about the risks of contracting the virus (22%).

"While conditions are certainly improving, it remains clear there is more work to be done to ensure patients and survivors can get the health care they need when they need it," said Lisa Lacasse, president of ACS CAN. "Hopefully as more health care facilities safely resume full operations and more people are able to get vaccinated, screenings—which are essential to early cancer detection and prevention—can be more easily accessed."

Overall, most survey respondents said their provider gave them information about the recommended regular preventive care needed as a survivor (73%) and that such care was easy for them to access (82%). However, for those in the 40-49 age range—the age at which people should begin mammograms and colonoscopies—nearly 1 in 5 (19%) reported that they were not given prevention information and 20% said they encountered barriers to getting preventive care.

In addition to pandemic-related questions, the survey also asked patients about their overall cancer care experience. Responses showed continued racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in the health care system. Seventy-eight percent of respondents said their health care provider asked them what they wanted from their treatment and made them an active part of their cancer treatment decisions. While 22%, or 1 in 5, said they were not asked or were unsure and 15% of Hispanic, American Indian or Asian patients said they did not feel they were an active participant

in their treatment decisions, compared to 12% of white respondents.

While the vast majority of those surveyed said they were confident they got the best available treatment for their cancer (88%), patients with annual incomes at or below \$35,000 were less likely to agree with that statement (81%).

The survey also asked respondents what they would consider the top priorities for improving health care. Respondents ranked the cost of health care as the most important challenge facing cancer patients and survivors (36%). It ranked as the top issue across numerous demographics including young survivors under 40 (43%), those with incomes below \$35,000 (40%), and those with privately purchased (39%) or employer-based coverage (39%).

“When you add up premiums, high deductibles, co-pays and co-insurance, the costs of cancer can be overwhelming, especially for those with lower incomes,” said Lacasse. “It’s more evidence that policymakers should act quickly to make the increased subsidies available to those buying private insurance on the exchanges permanent, reign in junk insurance plans that leave patients at high risk for shouldering even higher out-of-pocket costs, and do everything possible to expand Medicaid. The pandemic has had a serious effect on cancer patients and lawmakers need to do everything they can to lessen the negative long-term impact by ensuring cancer patients can get timely, affordable health coverage that allows them to access the care they need.”

The web-based survey was taken by 1,280 cancer patients and survivors between March 30, 2021 and May 14, 2021. This sample provides a margin of error +/- 3% and 96% confidence level.

Read the full [polling memo](#).