



Improve outcomes and access to cancer care



Address social determinants of health to support cancer patients

Cancer death rates have generally declined in the last few decades due to advances in cancer prevention, detection, treatment and long-term care.¹ And yet, not everyone benefits equally from these advances.

Research suggests that social determinants of health (SDOH), or social factors shaped by where a person grew up, lives or works, play a significant role in shaping a person's access to quality cancer care.² Addressing these factors is more important than ever. About a third of Americans are expected to be diagnosed with cancer by 2030,³ while cancer-related direct medical costs are expected to rise to \$250 billion in that same time frame.⁴

The Optum® Cancer Support Program offers organizations ways to help their members or employees address the impact of SDOH in cancer care.

What is the Cancer Support Program?

The Optum Cancer Support Program provides information and resources to help cancer patients learn more about their diagnosis so they can make more informed decisions about their care. Patients in the program are supported from diagnosis through survivorship by a team of oncology professionals, including doctors, nurses and social workers. Program participants are able to:

- Get information on treatment options and medications
- Find ways to help manage side effects
- Learn how to advocate for themselves with their care team
- Learn how to take care of their emotional health
- Access a digital portal with articles, video courses and easy-to-use tools

Ultimately, case management can help lower costs and ensure patients receive quality care by preventing unnecessary hospitalizations and inappropriate treatments. With over 15 years of oncology case management experience, the Optum Cancer Support Program is an available resource to over 15 million health plan members per year.



One-third

of Americans are expected to be diagnosed with cancer by 2030.³



Cancer-related direct medical costs are expected to rise to

\$250 billion

by 2030.⁴

What are social determinants of health?

Social determinants of health are situational factors impacting a person's ability to access quality health care and live a healthy life.⁵ These factors are tied to where people live, work and socialize. They are also shaped by various power structures and systems, such as governments, health care systems and economies.

Some common SDOH include:

- Access to food, nutrition and housing
- Education status
- Employment and income status
- Community/social support networks
- Access to transportation
- Access to health care

Dealing with a cancer diagnosis is hard enough, and SDOH place even greater burdens and limitations on people of disadvantaged backgrounds. That's because, despite advances in cancer treatment and prevention, SDOH shape population health outside the health care system.⁶ More than treatment advances alone are needed to address poor health outcomes.

In fact, SDOH may have a significantly higher impact on health outcomes than the clinical care a patient receives. In one survey of 165 physicians⁷:

- 93% of physicians said that SDOH had a significant impact on their patients' health outcomes.
- 83% of physicians said that financial security and lack of insurance was a barrier for their patients.
- 58% of physicians said that access to transportation was a barrier for their patients.

Ultimately, SDOH impact the care a patient receives (or doesn't receive), leading to delayed, ineffective or improper treatment, higher costs, and reduced quality of life and expected lifespan.

How does the Cancer Support Program address SDOH?

The Cancer Support Program's team of oncology professionals have found that understanding a cancer patient's unique SDOH will lead to better health outcomes. By offering reliable resources that address specific SDOH concerns, we're able to break down these barriers in cancer care.

Through a team of nurses and social workers, the Cancer Support Program empowers patients to manage common SDOH, including financial, transportation, health literacy and education. They help address social support needs impacting the patient, caregiver or family, and provide emotional support and resources through referrals to local and government agencies.



Financial support

Socioeconomic inequities, particularly related to financial status or access to adequate health insurance coverage, can pose significant hurdles to accessing cancer care. This is especially troubling when the estimated patient cost of cancer care in the United States was over \$16 billion,⁸ and 1 in 12 people had no health insurance.⁹

Cancer Support Program social workers provide financial support by educating and empowering members to learn about their diagnosis and use their benefit package. They also refer members to government programs such as social security, disability, Medicare and Medicaid, utility assistance programs and medication access programs.



SDOH shape population health outside the health care system.⁶ In fact, SDOH may have a significantly higher impact on health outcomes than the actual clinical care a patient receives.⁷



\$16 billion

was the estimated patient cost of cancer care in the U.S. in 2019.⁸



1 in 12

people had no health insurance in the U.S. in 2020.⁹



Transportation solutions

Cancer treatment can be time-consuming and require frequent clinic visits. For some patients, particularly those living in rural areas, getting to a clinic regularly can be a significant obstacle to receiving care.

Optum case managers and social workers provide resources and information that help coordinate transportation for patients, to assist them in getting to a clinic for treatment.



Health literacy and education support

Cancer is a complex disease requiring careful adherence to complex treatment plans. Managing these treatments can be impacted by education levels. Effective health literacy and education can impact a patient's behavior and how (or if) they make use of services available to them.¹⁰

Cancer Support Program case managers provide participating patients with clear, reliable information, empowering them to make informed decisions about their care. They help patients explore available treatment options, including hospice and palliative care, and provide health and well-being resources to cancer survivors.



Social support

Loneliness or a lack of social support can impact quality of life and overall patient outcomes. Research suggests that focusing more on social services programs to support people in a community can have a positive impact on health outcomes.¹¹

Cancer Support Program case managers work as advocates for their patients to ensure they get access to the best possible care. They can connect patients to a range of community resources as well as psychosocial services, which helps patients and their families cope with a diagnosis, treatment challenges or prepare for the end of life.

With the Cancer Support Program, we can work together to ensure patients get the right care at the right time while addressing their unique SDOH.



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Find out how the Optum Cancer Support Program can help support the needs of your organization:

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