

Paid Leave is an Important Component of Cancer Care for Working Patients, Survivors and Caregivers



In 2018, over 6 million workers in the U.S. had a history of cancer.¹ Cancer treatment is time consuming – often requiring time off from work for doctor’s visits, surgery and recovery, chemotherapy and radiation. The flexibility to balance cancer treatment and employment is essential.

Studies show that cancer patients who have paid leave have higher rates of job retention and lower rates of financial burden.^{2,3} Yet not all cancer patients, survivors and caregivers who work have access to paid leave, and without it they risk losing employment or not getting the care they need.

Cancer Patient, Survivor and Caregiver Experiences with Leave

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) conducted multiple surveys in 2017-2019 to explore this issue amongst cancer patients, survivors and caregivers – as well as business owners.⁴

The survey results showed that access to paid medical/family leave makes an important difference for cancer patients, survivors and their caregivers; contributing to positive outcomes like being able to complete treatment, manage symptoms and side effects and afford treatments.

	Patients/Survivors	
% Positive Impact – Used/Didn’t Use Paid Medical/Family Leave	Have Paid Leave & Used It (27%)	Have Paid Leave But Didn’t Use It (24%)
Being able to complete your treatment	80%	34%
Your doctor or treatment appointments	77%	31%
Managing your symptoms or side effects	70%	27%
The decisions you made about which treatments to receive or where to receive them	66%	23%
Affording your treatments	64%	22%
The number of different treatment options to which you had access	63%	21%

Note: Respondents were able to check multiple options in this question, so the percentages do not add up to 100.

Access to Paid Leave is a Health Equity Issue

- Respondents who were less likely to report having paid medical/family leave across all the three survey populations were those with **lower levels of education** and **income** and those working in **smaller companies** with fewer than 100 employees.
- Respondents who reported having issues with cancer/caregiving and their job – including the quality of their work suffering, having to take two or more days off of work in a row, or having to leave work early – most often tended to be those in **lower income households**, those with **lower levels of education**, **younger respondents**, and those **working in smaller companies**.

Additionally, those respondents who had paid medical/family leave were less likely to report experiencing problems related to financial pressures than those who did not have it.

**50% of cancer patients
34% of cancer survivors
48% of caregivers**

...report experiencing problems related to financial pressures caused by not being able to work or having to reduce the amount of hours one can work during their illness or their loved one's illness.

ACS CAN Position

The need for access to paid medical & family leave became clearer nationwide during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. ACS CAN encourages policymakers at all levels to continue exploring this issue. ACS CAN supports policies at the national, state and local levels that increase access to job-protected paid family & medical leave that can be used for cancer treatments, survivorship care, and caregiving as well as other illnesses.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics. Survey Description (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/data-questionnaires-documentation.htm>), 2018 National Health Interview Survey Public Use Data Release. Hyattsville, Maryland. Analysis performed by American Cancer Society Intramural Research team, April 7, 2020.

² Veenstra CM, Regenbogen SE, Hawley ST, Abrahamse P, Banerjee M, Morris AM. Association of Paid Sick Leave With Job Retention and Financial Burden Among Working Patients With Colorectal Cancer. JAMA. 2015 Dec 22 29;314(24):2688-90. doi: 10.1001/jama.2015.12383. PubMed PMID: 26717032.

³ Veenstra, C.M., Abrahamse, P., Wagner, T.H., Hawley, S.T., Banerjee, M. & Morris, A.M. (2018). Employment Benefits and Job Retention: Evidence Among Patients With Colorectal Cancer. Cancer Med. 2018 Mar; 7(3): 736–745. doi: 10.1002/cam4.1371.

⁴ See Public Opinion Strategies. Key Findings – National Survey of Cancer Patients, Survivors and Caregivers. December 8, 2017.

<https://www.fightcancer.org/sites/default/files/ACS%20CAN%20Paid%20Leave%20Surveys%20Key%20Findings%20Press%20Memo%20FINAL.pdf>