

# Understanding Access to Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## September 2020 Survey Findings Summary



### Overview:

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) gives voice to cancer patients and survivors on critical public policy issues that affect their lives. As part of this effort, ACS CAN deploys surveys to better understand cancer patients and survivors' experiences and perspectives, through efforts such as our [Survivor Views](#) research panel.

Our most recent survey effort was initiated on Thursday, August 27, 2020, and was deployed across a three-week fielding period to a broad cross-section of cancer patients and survivors. Respondents were invited to participate through direct email outreach and social media promotion. The survey focused on respondents' experiences and opinions related to accessing cancer care, including challenges accessing cancer care during the COVID-19 pandemic and perspectives on policy solutions that would help improve their ability to manage and pay for health care.

The web-based survey was completed by more than 2,000 cancer patients and survivors. This sample provides a margin of error +/-3% and 99% confidence level. The research provides important insights into the experiences and opinions of cancer patients and survivors in accessing care for their cancer in the midst of the pandemic.

### Key Findings:

Key findings from the 2020 survey include:

- In the six months since the COVID-19 pandemic arose in the United States, cancer patients and survivors have encountered multiple challenges accessing health care. As a result, 26% of respondents have experienced delays or cancellations of health care services directly related to their cancer since the pandemic began. When considering only respondents who are in current treatment for their cancer, nearly one in three (32%) have had their cancer-related health care delayed or cancelled.
- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to produce substantial anxiety among cancer patients and survivors, with nearly two-thirds (64%) reporting that they are worried about their ability to stay safe in the face of a potential increase in COVID-19 cases. This concern was particularly strong among non-white respondents (68%), a population that has been particularly impacted by the pandemic, and those who are in active treatment for their cancer (74%).
- Respondents see access to comprehensive and portable health insurance as a critical tool in supporting people with cancer. Over half of cancer patients and survivors (51%) indicated that ensuring health insurance covers all needed care was the priority that would have the greatest impact in helping people with cancer. The second most commonly prioritized issue was ensuring affordable health insurance is available regardless of job changes (20%).

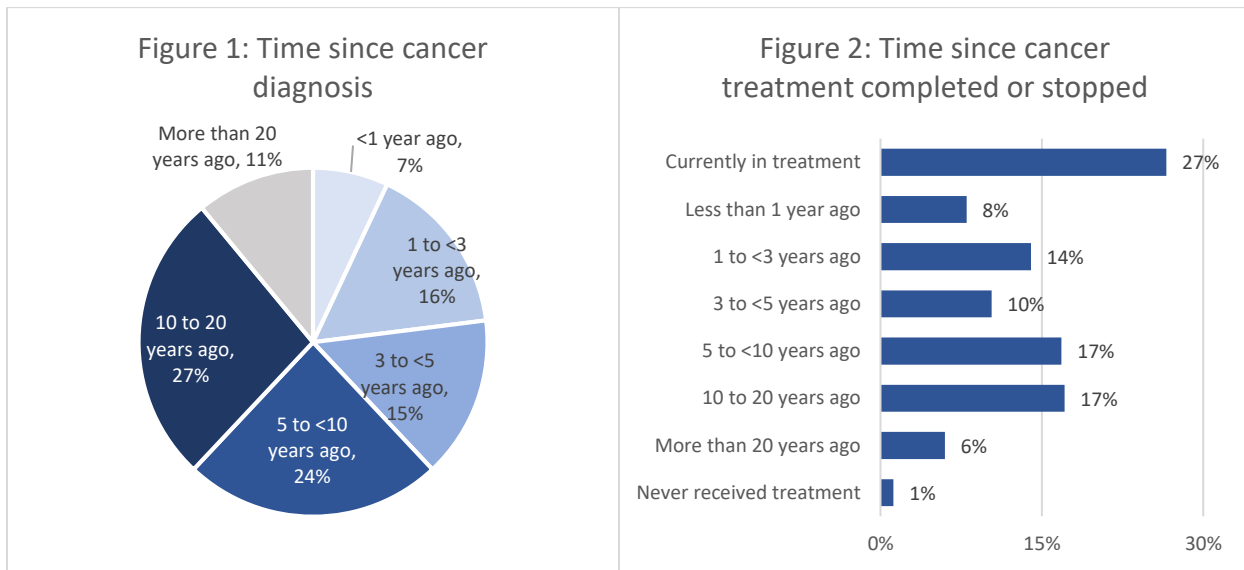
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### Detailed Survey Findings:

The survey included a wide range of US cancer patients and survivors. Fifty-eight percent had been first diagnosed with cancer within the last five years, and 27% were currently in treatment for their cancer at the time of the survey.



Most respondents' primary source of health insurance was through an employer-provided plan (44%) or Medicare (39%). An additional 6% are insured through a privately purchased plan and 5% through Medicaid.

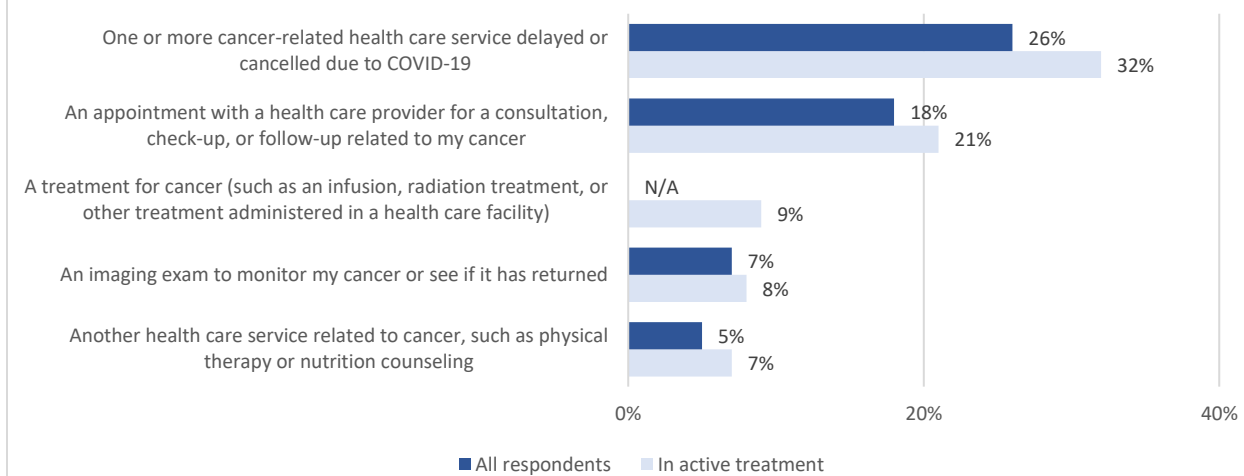
More than a quarter (26%) of respondents reported experiencing a delay or cancellation of one or more health care services related to their cancer since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in America, including an appointment with a health care provider for a consultation, check-up, or follow-up related to their cancer (18%), an imaging exam to monitor their cancer or see if it has returned (7%), and other health care services directly related to their cancer (5%). Among cancer survivors currently in treatment, the incidence of delays or cancellations is even greater, with 32% reporting this experience. Of particular concern, 9% of patients in active treatment had their cancer treatment delayed or cancelled including treatments such as an infusion, radiation treatment, or other treatment administered in a health care facility.

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Figure 3: Cancer care delayed or cancelled due to COVID-19



Younger cancer patients and survivors were more likely to report delays or cancellations to their cancer care resulting from COVID-19, with 44% of respondents under the age of 40 and 29% of those between 40 and 60 years old reporting delays. By comparison, 22% respondents from 70-79 years old experienced care disruptions and only 5% of those 80 years or older did so.

The most common reason for care delay or cancellation was office or facility closure, with 48% of respondents who had experienced care disruptions reporting this as a cause. However, respondents also reported delays resulting from concern about the risk of contracting COVID-19, even when the office or facility was open. Thirty-one percent of respondents reported they had initiated a delay or cancellation of cancer-related health care due to concern about contracting the virus, and 24% reported their provider had delayed or cancelled care due to this concern.

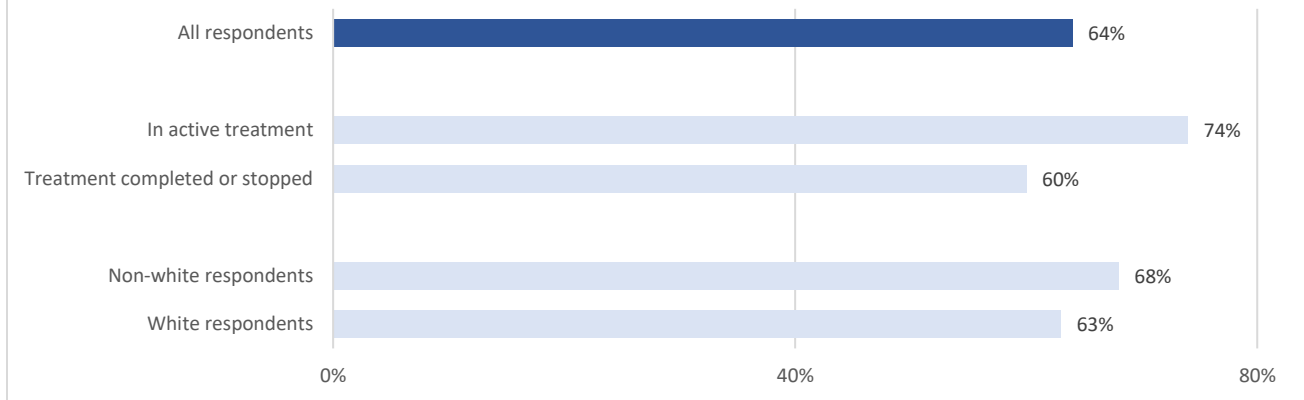
Concern about contracting COVID-19 has not only resulted in disruptions to cancer care, but also creates anxiety among cancer patients and survivors. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) reported worry about their ability to stay safe should COVID-19 cases increase. This concern was particularly strong among respondents currently in treatment for their cancer (74%).

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Figure 4: Agree or strongly agree with the statement "As a cancer patient or survivor, I am worried about my ability to stay safe if COVID-19 cases increase"



In addition to sharing their direct experiences, respondents were also asked to provide their perspectives on health care policy priorities to support people with cancer. Over half of cancer patients and survivors selected as the priority that would have the biggest impact on helping all people with cancer is "Ensuring health insurance covers all needed care" (selected by 51% of respondents). An additional 20% of respondents selected "Ensuring affordable health insurance is available even if your job changes."

While these two priorities were consistently high, there were some relative differences for specific respondent groups, as outlined in the tables below. Notably, portability of coverage was more important to respondents who are covered by an employer-provided or privately purchased plan compared to those insured through government programs (Medicare and Medicaid). Additionally, respondents earning \$60,000 a year or less in household income were nearly twice as likely to indicate prescription drug affordability as a priority compared to respondents with higher household income.

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Table 1: Analysis by insurance type – Thinking about how we can help all people with cancer, which of the following priorities do you think would have the biggest impact?

	All respondents (N=2081)	Insurance type			
		Employer-provided (n=909)	Medicaid (n=93)	Medicare (n=801)	Privately purchased (n=126)
Ensuring health insurance covers all needed care	51%	48%	59%	55%	38%
Ensuring affordable health insurance is available even if your job changes	20%	25%	19%	16%	23%
Reducing the out of pocket cost of health insurance (for example, co-pays, deductibles)	18%	19%	5%	18%	28%
Making prescription medicines more affordable	8%	6%	14%	9%	5%
Other	3%	2%	2%	2%	6%

Table 2: Analysis by household income – Thinking about how we can help all people with cancer, which of the following priorities do you think would have the biggest impact?

	All respondents (N=2081)	Annual household income			
		\$30,000 or less (n=397)	\$30,001 to \$60,000 (n=452)	\$60,001 to \$110,000 (n=534)	\$110,001 or more (n=266)
Ensuring health insurance covers all needed care	51%	53%	48%	49%	52%
Ensuring affordable health insurance is available even if your job changes	20%	16%	18%	25%	26%
Reducing the out of pocket cost of health insurance (for example, co-pays, deductibles)	18%	18%	20%	19%	15%
Making prescription medicines more affordable	8%	9%	10%	6%	5%
Other	3%	4%	3%	1%	2%

### Methodology:

The ACS CAN Understanding Access to Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic survey was administered online from August 27 through September 14, 2020. Cancer patients and survivors were invited to participate via direct email to American Cancer Society and ACS CAN contacts, promotion through ACS and ACS CAN social media accounts, and Facebook advertisements to individuals without a current relationship to ACS or ACS CAN. Qualifying participants included all individuals who had been diagnosed

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with cancer, reside in the United States or its territories, and were over the age of 18 as of the time of response. A total of 2,081 participants responded to the survey, providing a margin of error +/-3% and 99% confidence level.

### **About ACS CAN**

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is making cancer a top priority for public officials and candidates at the federal, state and local levels. ACS CAN empowers advocates across the country to make their voices heard and influence evidence-based public policy change as well as legislative and regulatory solutions that will reduce the cancer burden. As the American Cancer Society's nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate, ACS CAN is critical to the fight for a world without cancer. For more information, visit [www.fightcancer.org](http://www.fightcancer.org).