

BACKGROUND

Innovations in technology and biomedical treatment are transforming cancer care, yet many patients lack access to quality mental and behavioral health care. Cancer patients face substantial barriers to accessing care for emotional and mental health concerns due to practical barriers and shortages of qualified mental health providers, which have been exacerbated during pandemic conditions.

AIMS

To characterize emotional and mental health care experiences among cancer patients and survivors reporting post-diagnosis emotional or mental health concerns and assess accessibility, financial, attitudinal, instrumental, and stigma-related barriers to seeking and accessing mental health care.

METHODS

Individuals with cancer (N=658) who enrolled in Cancer Support Community's online Cancer Experience Registry completed a Spotlight Survey in August 2022 to assess mental health care access and barriers (Barriers to Access to Care Evaluation; Patient Satisfaction Questionnaire Short Form).

Eligibility: 18+ years and **reporting post-diagnosis emotional or mental health concerns**. Frequencies and percentages are reported.

PARTICIPANTS

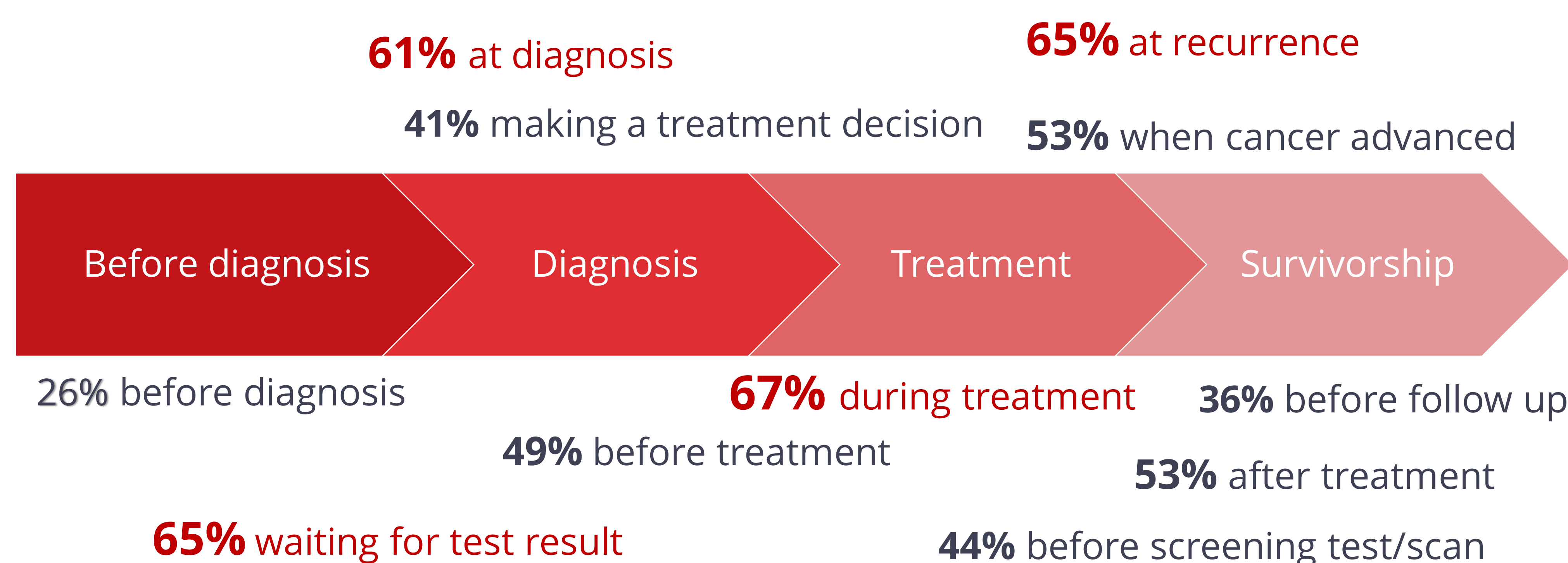
N = 658	n	%	n	%	
Age (years), range (22-85)	M=60	SD=12			
Race & Ethnicity					
Non-Hispanic White	557	84.7	Some or no college	176	26.8
Non-Hispanic Black	40	6.1	Associate/Bachelor degree	273	41.5
Non-Hispanic other/Multiracial	30	4.6	Graduate degree	200	30.4
Hispanic	23	3.5	Insurance Type		
Gender Identity			Private	277	42.1
Man	146	22.2	Medicare, only	161	24.5
Woman	509	77.4	Medicaid, only	34	5.2
Household Income			Multiple government	59	9.0
<\$40K	143	21.7	Private + government	52	7.9
≥\$40K	364	55.3	Other	23	3.5
Not reported	151	22.9	Not insured	9	1.4

RESULTS

Systems- and Individual-Level Factors Are Among Common Barriers Reported



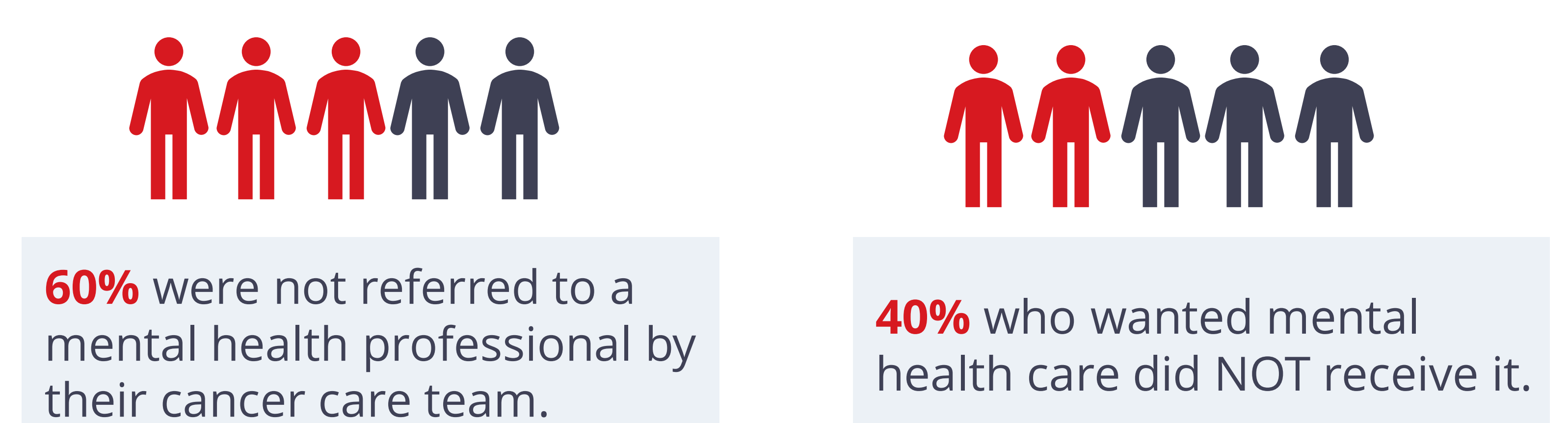
Emotional and Mental Health Concerns Are Prevalent Across the Cancer Continuum



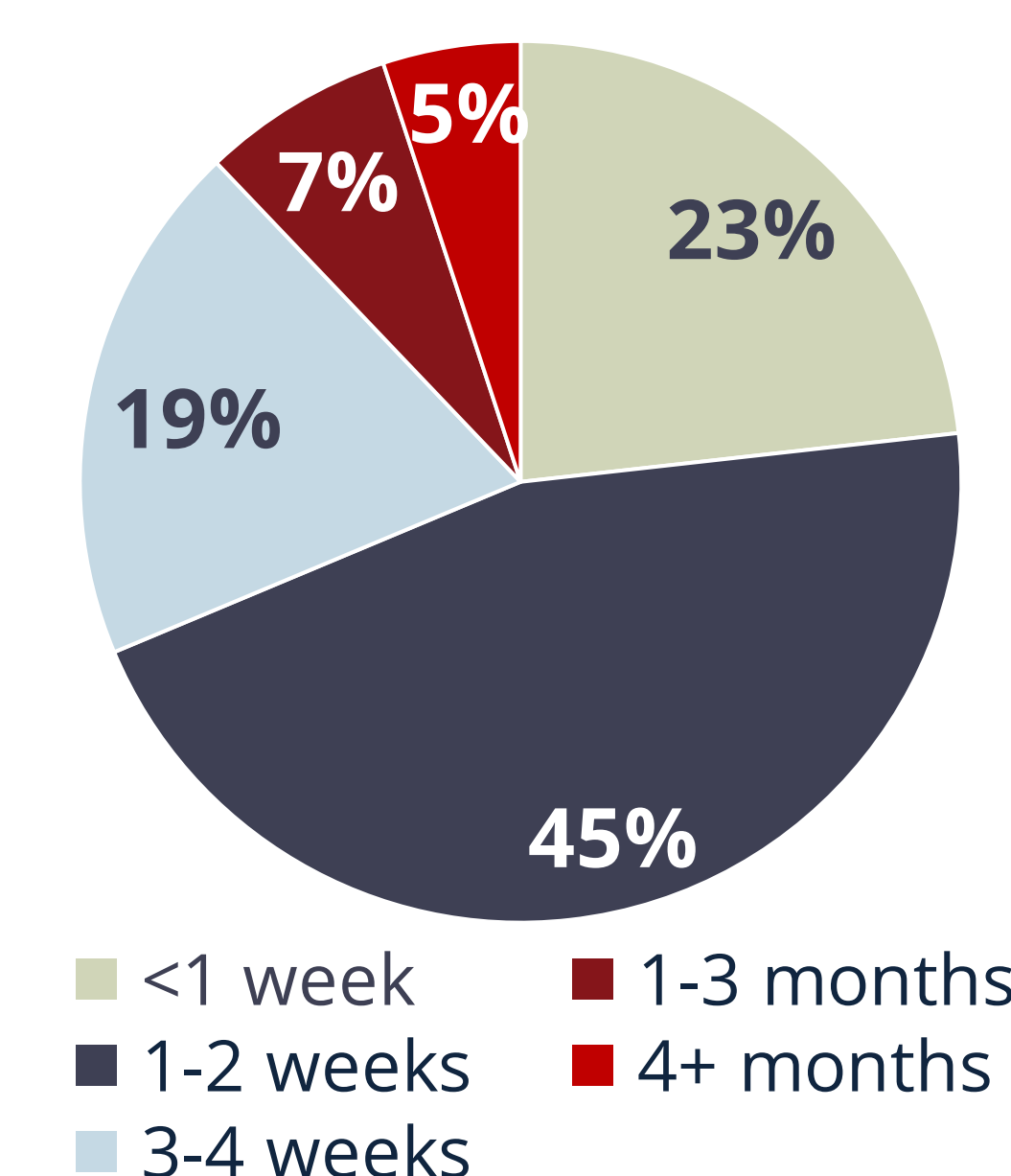
Emotional distress is prevalent among cancer patients across the cancer continuum, and many have pre-existing vulnerability.

Even those who are post-treatment or have no current evidence of disease often experience emotional distress.

Patients Need Improved Access to Mental Health Care



Wait Time



For those who sought care:

77% waited >1 week
31% waited >2 weeks
12% waited >4 weeks

31% used telehealth services
19% travelled >1 hour roundtrip to access care

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our findings demonstrate the frequently unmet emotional/mental health needs of cancer patients across the care continuum. Care access barriers go beyond basic availability of services to include proximity, cost, and long waiting times. Telehealth, digital apps, and collaborative care models may improve awareness, convenience, and access to treatment. The results also underscore the importance of whole-person cancer care including integrated emotional/mental health screening and follow-up.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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