

# Care Access and Support Barriers for Emotional and Mental Health Concerns **Among Individuals with Cancer**

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#### **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

Not reported

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

#### RESULTS

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



#### Emotional and Mental Health Concerns Are Prevalent Across the Cancer Continuum

#### 61% at diagnosis

65% at recurrence

41% making a treatment decision 53% when cancer advanced



**67%** during treatment

36% before follow up

49% before treatment

**53%** after treatment

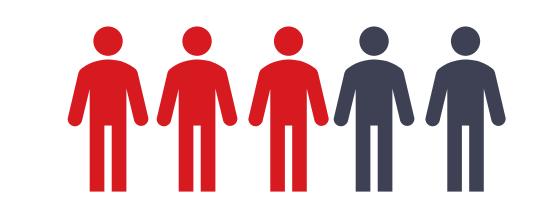
**65%** waiting for test result

44% before screening test/scan

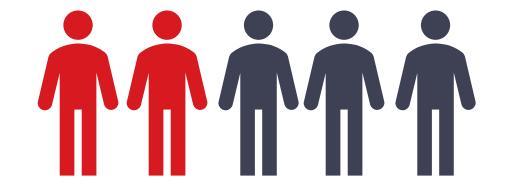
Emotional distress is prevalent among cancer patients across the cancer continuum, and many have pre-existing vulnerability.

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

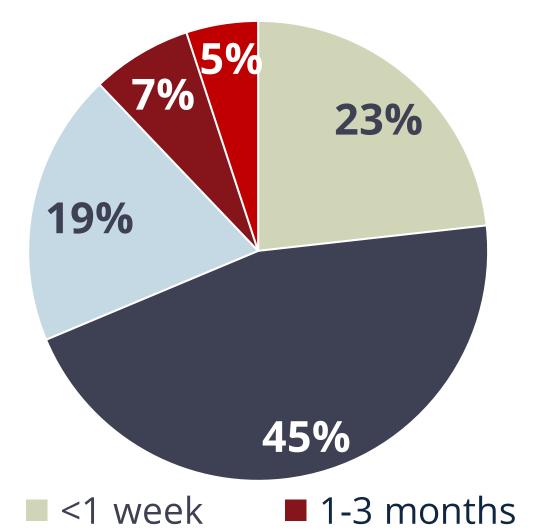


**60%** were not referred to a mental health professional by their cancer care team.



40% who wanted mental health care did NOT receive it.

#### **Wait Time**



■ 1-2 weeks

■ 3-4 weeks

■ 4+ months

#### 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.



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