



[cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345

Patient Navigation in Cancer Care

The cancer navigator connects a person with cancer with the help and support they need. The goal of cancer navigation is to find ways to overcome issues that keep people from getting access to quality cancer care. For example, navigators might help someone get a cancer screening and make sure that people who have abnormal test results get a follow-up visit. Or, the cancer navigator might help someone with cancer learn more about their cancer and its treatment. A cancer navigator might also help them manage money problems that come up during and after treatment.

[What Can a Cancer Navigator Do for Me?](#)

The cancer navigator helps people with cancer deal with issues that prevent them from getting screened and diagnosed, accessing cancer care, and finding the help they need after cancer treatment. The navigator provides support to the person with cancer as well as their caregivers and families.

[Types of Cancer Navigators](#)

Cancer navigators are trained to find and help address the needs of a person with cancer. But there are different kinds of navigators and they focus on different needs. A person with cancer may have one navigator or may work with several, based on their needs.

[How the American Cancer Society Supports Patient Navigation](#)

The American Cancer Society has led and funded efforts to build cancer navigation programs, promotes public policy to support navigation, and studies the role and benefits of navigation.

[Patient Navigation Training and Credentialing](#)

The American Cancer Society is developing a training and credentialing program for professional patient navigators, supporting the navigation workforce in improving care and reducing disparities.

What Can a Cancer Navigator Do for Me?

- [How do patient navigators help people with cancer?](#)

The cancer navigator helps people get past barriers that keep them from getting quality cancer care and the help they need during and after cancer treatment. The navigator can help find support for their caregivers and families too.

Cancer navigators start by talking with the person with cancer. They ask questions to find out what the person needs and what might keep them from getting the care they need. After their talk, navigators may then be able to:

- Answer questions and give them the information they need to help with make decisions.
- Help get them the resources they need.
- Help communicate with their health care providers.
- Coordinate care by making appointments and helping patients get to them.
- Get them support and resources for any practical, physical, social, spiritual, and mental health challenges.
- Follow up to check for new or ongoing questions and needs.

How do patient navigators help people with cancer?

Many things can stand in the way of a person with cancer getting the care they need.

Navigators can help with practical needs

- Transportation
- [Understanding and managing insurance](#)¹
- Money concerns
- Paying for or getting medications
- Having enough food
- Lodging
- Child and elder care
- Work and school-related issues

- Interpreters for people whose first language is not English

Navigators can help with physical needs

- Dealing with [side effects](#)² of treatment
- Improving the person's ability take care of themselves
- Getting equipment such as [prostheses](#)³, [ostomy](#)⁴ supplies, and [wigs](#)⁵
- Getting devices to help with movement and walking (mobility), such as a wheelchair or walker.
- Getting referrals for physical, occupational, or speech therapy
- Getting a referral for [home care](#)⁶, [palliative care](#)⁷, or [hospice care](#)⁸

Navigators can help with social and emotional needs

- Recognizing and coping with [anxiety and depression](#)⁹
- Understanding a diagnosis or treatment
- Dealing with [changes in appearance](#)¹⁰
- Changing work and home relationships
- Spiritual concerns
- [Support groups](#)¹¹
- Referral for counseling

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/financial-insurance-matters.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/prostheses.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/hair-skin-nails/hair-loss/choosing-and-wearing-wig.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/finding-care/home-care-agencies.html

7. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care/hospice-care.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/appearance.html
11. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/understanding-psychosocial-support-services.html

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Patient Navigation. Cdc.gov. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/screenoutcancer/patient-navigation.htm> on June 12, 2023.

Franklin E, Burke S, Dean M, Johnston D, Nevidjon B & Booth LS. Oncology navigation standards of professional practice. *J Oncol Navig Surviv.* 2022; 13.

Natale-Pereira A, Enard KR, Nevarez L, Jones LA. The role of patient navigators in eliminating health disparities. *Cancer.* 2011;117(15 Suppl): 3543-3552.

National Cancer Institute. Financial navigator. Cancer.gov. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/financial-navigator> on June 9, 2023.

National Cancer Institute. The Patient Navigator Research Program (PNRP). Cancer.gov. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.gov/pnrp-brochure.pdf> on June 12, 2023.

Wells KJ, Wightman P, Cobian Aguilar R, et al. Comparing clinical and nonclinical cancer patient navigators: A national study in the United States. *Cancer.* 2022;128 Suppl 13(Suppl 13): 2601-2609.

Last Revised: June 21, 2023

Types of Cancer Navigators

- [Clinical navigators](#)
- [Non-clinical navigators](#)
- [Navigators who focus on certain groups or needs](#)

Clinical navigators

These navigators are trained health care professionals. Their roles can depend on their training and background.

Oncology nurse navigators

Oncology nurse navigators are registered nurses with knowledge about cancer care. Oncology nurse navigators may:

- Work with the cancer care team to coordinate patient care.
- Help keep track of how the person with cancer is doing.
- Help manage symptoms and side effects.
- Help people understand their cancer, testing, treatment, and what they might expect during and after treatment.
- Answer questions about cancer and cancer treatment.

Oncology social work navigators

Oncology social work navigators are social workers who also know about cancer care and social and mental health issues. Oncology social work navigators can:

- Help identify a person's social and emotional needs.
- Provide treatment services or resources to meet those needs.
- Answer questions about cancer and cancer treatment.

Non-clinical navigators

These navigators get special training but are not health care professionals.

Oncology patient navigators

- Might work for an organization or may be volunteers.
- Can help with non-clinical information and resources.
- May be trained to help at a certain time or with a specific group. For example, they might focus on getting more people screened for cancer, helping set up tests and appointments for someone newly diagnosed with cancer, or setting people up with needed resources during treatment.

Oncology navigation support volunteers

- Provide non-clinical support through a healthcare or community organization.
- Are trained to provide information, resources, and support, and are not paid for these services.
- May also have had cancer themselves or as a caregiver.
- Can provide support in-person, by phone, on-line.

Navigators who focus on certain groups or needs

Cancer site-specific navigators support people with a specific type of cancer. They most often are oncology nurse navigators.

Financial navigators help people with cancer understand what their health insurance plan may cover and what they will have to pay out of pocket expenses. They may also help people set up payment plans and find ways to lower treatment costs so they can get the care they need.

Clinical trials navigators provide information and help ease concerns about being in a clinical trial. They can help answer questions, arrange transportation, and help with insurance issues as needed.

Population-specific navigators focus on the needs of underserved groups of people to make it easier for them to get cancer screening and care. These navigators are often non-clinical and come from the community they are serving to help build trust.

Pediatric/adolescent/young adult navigators focus on the needs of children, teenagers, or young adults with cancer and their families.

Cancer screening navigators focus on the needs of people getting screened for certain types of cancer, such as lung, breast, or colorectal cancer. They work to get

more people screened and help those who may have cancer get further testing and the information they need.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Patient Navigation. Cdc.gov. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/screenoutcancer/patient-navigation.htm> on June 12, 2023.

Franklin E, Burke S, Dean M, Johnston D, Nevidjon B & Booth LS. Oncology navigation standards of professional practice. *J Oncol Navig Surviv.* 2022; 13.

Natale-Pereira A, Enard KR, Nevarez L, Jones LA. The role of patient navigators in eliminating health disparities. *Cancer.* 2011;117(15 Suppl):3543-3552.

National Cancer Institute. Financial navigator. Cancer.gov. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/financial-navigator> on June 9, 2023.

National Cancer Institute. The Patient Navigator Research Program (PNRP). Cancer.gov. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.gov/pnrp-brochure.pdf> on June 12, 2023.

Wells KJ, Wightman P, Cobian Aguilar R, et al. Comparing clinical and nonclinical cancer patient navigators: A national study in the United States. *Cancer.* 2022;128 Suppl 13(Suppl 13):2601-2609.

Last Revised: June 20, 2023

How the American Cancer Society Supports Patient Navigation

The American Cancer Society (ACS) believes that patient navigation is critical to improving access to care for everyone. Navigation can remove barriers and improve access to care through patient-centered support from screening through survivorship. ACS has led and funded efforts to build navigation programs, supported public policy to support navigation, and studies the role and benefits of navigation.

ACS supports navigation through:

- [ACS CARES™¹](#) (**Community Access to Resources, Education, and Support**), that connects people with cancer and caregivers to information and resources chosen for each person's needs through the ACS CARES™ app, ACS team members, or ACS volunteer support.
- [ACS Patient Navigation Roundtable²](#), which shares research and best practices that support patient navigation, helps define navigator roles, and provides resources to help cancer navigation programs continue.
- **ACS Patient Navigation Initiative**, giving grants, education and support to 20 health systems with that provide care to historically excluded populations.
- [ACS Global BEACON Initiative³](#), that provides training, support, and grants for patient navigation in low- and middle – income countries.
- [ACS CAN⁴](#)'s⁵ policy priorities to support navigation with a multi-year campaign to get Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance coverage and payment for patient navigators.
- [ACS Health Equity Ambassadors⁶](#) work in their local communities to provide education for African American/Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American and rural populations on cancer prevention and early detection.
- [ACS Patient Navigation Training and Credentialing⁷](#) to support the professional patient navigation workforce.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services/acs-cares.html
2. navigationroundtable.org/
3. www.cancer.org/about-us/our-global-health-work/cancer-care-patient-support.html
4. www.fightcancer.org/
5. www.fightcancer.org/
6. www.cancer.org/about-us/what-we-do/multicultural/heal.html
7. www.cancer.org/health-care-professionals/resources-for-professionals/patient-navigator-training.html

Last Revised: June 21, 2023

Written by

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team
(<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html>)

Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

American Cancer Society medical information is copyrighted material. For reprint requests, please see our Content Usage Policy (www.cancer.org/about-us/policies/content-usage.html).

cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345