ACA Leads to Better Care

The Affordable Care Act erases racial disparities in care for advanced cancers.

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Having good health insurance leads to better outcomes for people with cancer, according to a set of studies presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology annual meeting in June.

One study found that states that expanded their Medicaid programs under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) reduced racial differences in timely cancer treatment. Another showed that early detection and treatment of ovarian cancer increased after the ACA went into effect.

Amy Davidoff, PhD, of Yale School of Public Health, reported that Medicaid expansion led to faster treatment for eight kinds of advanced cancer. What's more, it nearly eliminated the gap between the proportion of white people and African Americans who received treatment within 30 days after diagnosis—although in both groups, about half still weren't treated within this window.

But Medicaid, which restricts access to certain treatments, may not be enough. Kamal Chamoun, MD, of University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center in Cleveland, reported that multiple myeloma patients with private insurance had a 59% greater probability of survival than those covered by Medicaid.

"Cancer injustice is not a science problem. It is not a technology or a genetics problem. It is a policy problem," says Yousuf Zafar, MD, of Duke Cancer Institute in Durham, North Carolina.

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