

Biden's Cancer Moonshot to Boost Access to Patient Navigation Services

Major private health insurers will cover the cost of patient navigators, who guide people through cancer treatment.

March 13, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

During his State of the Union address, President Joe Biden announced the expansion of the Cancer Moonshot initiative, including efforts to improve access to patient navigators, those trained professionals who guide people with cancer through what can be a confusing and arduous journey of treatment hurdles, insurance coverage, clinical trials and other challenges.

But now, thanks to the Cancer Moonshot, more health insurers will cover the cost of using patient navigators, and more cancer centers will offer patient navigator services. Indeed, over 150 million Americans will be able to access navigation services, [according to a White House statement](#).

The Cancer Moonshot refers to a series of federal health initiatives Vice President Biden launched in 2016 and that the Biden-Harris administration reignited in 2022 with new actions and commitments, including the creation of a Cancer Cabinet that enlists more than 15 federal agencies and White House departments to accelerate progress for people facing cancer. ([Read this statement](#) from last fall for a list of Moonshot accomplishments and commitments.)

The Moonshot aims to reduce the cancer death rate in the United States by at least half by 2047, prevent more than 4 million cancer deaths and improve the experience of those touched by cancer. As Biden has said, the goal is to end cancer as we know it.

[In a March 8 statement](#) following the State of the Union address, the White House announced several initiatives and advances regarding cancer goals:

- [Commitments from seven leading health insurance companies](#) to begin paying for navigation services to help patients and their families navigate health care treatments for cancer and other serious illnesses. These health insurers—Aetna, a CVS Health company; Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota; Elevance Health; Health Alliance Plan; Humana; Priority Health; and Select Health—serve more than 150 million patients, nearly half of all Americans across the country.

- [Commitments from 40 comprehensive cancer centers and community oncology practices nationwide](#) to use the new navigation codes to provide patient navigation services to people facing cancer.
- [A new program through the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health](#) that will harness advanced technologies to improve real-time understanding and treatment of tumor changes to improve rates of successful treatment.

Navigation programs offer individualized assistance and support to patients, helping them figure out how to pay for cancer treatment, how to participate in clinical trials, how to connect to social services to meet food and transportation needs, and more. Navigators work one-on-one with patients to encourage continued commitment and adherence to medical treatment, resulting in better outcomes, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The Biden-Harris administration said the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services would begin paying for certain navigation services for older Americans this year. Among the 40 cancer care centers and clinics expanding navigator services are the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, the Duke Cancer Institute, Northwell Health and the Mayo Clinic.

“Getting the right care is particularly challenging for patients living in communities that have been historically under-resourced, who experience numerous barriers to getting the care they need when they need it,” said American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network president Lisa Lacasse, [in a](#) statement about the Cancer Moonshot’s new focus. “Patient navigation can help reduce these disparities, and expanding coverage among private payers is a step toward increasing access to it.”

It’s estimated that more than 2 million people will be diagnosed with cancer in 2024, according to the [American Cancer Society’s Cancer Statistics, 2024](#), released in January. Although the country’s cancer mortality fell by 33% from 1991 through 2021, research warns that increases in some common cancers threaten this progress.

For example, the incidence rate for breast cancer has increased by about 0.6% every year since the mid-2000s. Similarly, prostate cancer incidence increased by about 3% per year following an estimated 40% drop from 2007 to 2014.

In related news, the National Cancer Institute last spring unveiled a [National Cancer Plan with eight goals](#) to help bolster the Cancer Moonshot.