

More Cancer Survivors Using Crowdfunding Campaigns to Pay Medical and Living Expenses

American Cancer Society researchers stress the need for public health policies to help make healthcare affordable for patients with cancer.

November 14, 2025 By American Cancer Society

In a new study published by researchers at the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS), a growing number of cancer survivors and their families in the United States are using crowdfunding campaigns to help pay for medical and other basic household expenses. Most cancer-related crowdfunding campaigns received some funds, but only about one-ninth reached their fundraising goals. The study will be published today in the Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (JNCCN).

“The use of crowdfunding is growing and shortages between financial assistance requested and received are substantial, underscoring unmet financial needs among cancer survivors in the U.S.,” said [Dr. Jason Zheng](#), senior principal scientist, health services research at the American Cancer Society, and lead author of the study. “However, it is important to note that only a small fraction of the more than 18 million cancer survivors in the U.S. initiated crowdfunding for financial help.”

For this research, scientists utilized a large natural language processing (NLP) model to review over 78,000 fundraiser stories related to cancer from January 2021 to February 2023 on GoFundMe campaigns and collected 90-day donation records after campaign initiations. Additional campaign information gathered included the fundraising goal and the total amount of money raised. A list of guiding questions was designed and implemented in the NLP model to analyze each fundraiser story and extract the sociodemographic characteristics of the cancer survivor. The information included the beneficiary’s age, sex, marital status, family size, insurance coverage, employment status, whether living with dependent children, cancer site and stage, time since diagnosis, treatment status, campaign organizer, and length of campaign stories.

Researchers found that among cancer-related crowdfunding campaigns with 4.45 million donation records, a total of \$506 million was raised (\$233.7 million annually), accounting for 34.5% of total financial assistance requested (\$1.47 billion). After adjusting for population size, \$109,191 was

raised annually per 100,000 people in the U.S. Moreover, the median fundraising goal was \$10,000, and the median amount of money received was \$4,000. Only 11.5% of campaigns reached their fundraising goals during the 90-day follow-up period. Campaigns with fundraiser stories describing beneficiaries who were younger, male, married, living with dependent children, working or attending school, or diagnosed with metastatic disease were more successful in raising more money and achieving their fundraising goals.

“Although cancer-related GoFundMe campaigns raised millions of dollars, it is less than 5% of estimated patient out-of-pocket costs annually,” Zheng added. “Utilizing the private market may help some patients, but public health policies are needed to make healthcare affordable for all patients with cancer.”

This story was published by the [American Cancer Society](#) on November 10, 2025. It is republished with permission.

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