

Federally Funded Clinical Trials Play a Vital Role in Cancer Care

Government-funded trials more often involved rare cancers and pediatric cancers.

December 8, 2025 By [Liz Highleyman](#)

Federally funded clinical trials provide crucial support for essential areas of cancer care that are not well funded by pharmaceutical companies, according to new research presented at the 2025 ASCO Quality Care Symposium.

Joseph Unger, PhD, of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, and colleagues looked at data from the National Institutes of Health's ClinicalTrials.gov registry from 2008 to 2024 to identify U.S. trials of drugs or biological agents for cancer treatment. Of the more than 10,000 trials included in the analysis, 17% were federally funded, while 83% were industry funded.

Government-funded trials more often involved rare cancers and pediatric cancers. Federally funded studies were more likely to be early and mid-stage (Phase I or II) clinical trials, which assess pharmacokinetics, safety and preliminary efficacy. Industry studies, in contrast, were more often Phase III trials, which test new therapies in larger populations to support regulatory approval. While companies funded more single-agent drug trials, the government funded more studies of combination regimens and dose de-escalation trials, which aim to reduce the intensity of treatment to minimize side effects and cost while maintaining effectiveness.

"Federal trials fill critical gaps left by industry," Unger says. "Sustained or increased funding is essential to maintain progress in these areas and to maintain a healthy cancer research ecosystem that balances federally sponsored and industry-sponsored trials."
