

American Cancer Society Advances in Oncology: 2024 Research Highlights

American Cancer Society showcases key studies to help prevent, detect, treat and survive cancer.

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Scientists at the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS) continued to set the standard for research excellence and innovation in 2024. Important discoveries, including ground-breaking studies such as the VOICES of Black Women®, are helping to transform cancer treatment and care and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families.

"We're very proud of this new research," said [Dr. William Dahut](#), chief scientific officer at the American Cancer Society. "It will not only assist in the discovery of new treatments for cancer patients and care for survivors, but find better ways to help overcome disparities associated with the disease."

Key ACS research advances this year include:

United States Surpasses Two Million New Cancer Diagnoses; Colorectal Cancer Incidence Rises in Younger Patients

In the organization's annual report on cancer facts and trends, [Cancer Statistics, 2024](#), ACS researchers projected over 2 million new cancer diagnoses in the U.S. this year, for the first time ever. Despite an ongoing decline in overall cancer mortality, resulting in over 4 million fewer deaths since 1991, the report uncovered an alarming continuous increase in colorectal cancer in younger Americans and found that cancer patients, in general, are getting younger. Due to rising colorectal cancer incidence, mortality patterns are shifting in adults under 50 years of age. Colorectal cancer has moved from being the fourth leading cause of cancer death in both younger men and women two decades ago, to first in men and second in women. Among adults under 50 years of age, an increase in overall cancer incidence was seen from 1995 to 2020. Researchers emphasized the need to reverse these trends by encouraging cancer prevention and screening, including the use of non-invasive stool tests and follow-up care to detect the disease.

Global Cancer Deaths Expected to Reach 35 Million by 2050

In [Global Cancer Statistics, 2024](#), ACS researchers found that an estimated 20 million cancer cases

were newly diagnosed in 2022, and 9.7 million people died from the disease worldwide. By 2050, the number of cancer cases is predicted to reach 35 million. The report showed high cancer mortality rates in many low-income countries despite low cancer incidence, largely due to a lack of or inadequate early detection and treatment services. In particular, disparities in cervical cancer mortality were observed. Cervical cancer continues to be the leading cause of cancer death in women in 37 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America, and globally, only 15% of eligible girls have received the vaccine against the human papillomavirus (HPV). Only 36% of women worldwide have undergone screening for cervical cancer, with substantial disparities across countries.

Breast Cancer Continues to Disproportionately Impact Underrepresented Groups

In [Breast Cancer Statistics, 2024](#), ACS researchers found that breast cancer mortality rates have dropped by 44% since 1989, averting approximately 517,900 deaths, but not all groups benefit equally. Among American Indian and Alaska Native women, mortality rates have remained unchanged over the past three decades. There is a continued upward trend in breast cancer incidence, rising by 1% annually from 2012-2021, with the steepest increase in women younger than 50 years (1.4% per year).

The VOICES of Black Women® Study

This year, ACS launched the largest behavioral and environmental-focused population study of cancer risk and outcomes in Black women in the U.S., the VOICES of Black Women® study. The long-term report will gather valuable data from over 100,000 Black women between the ages of 25 and 55, from diverse backgrounds and income levels, to better understand the multi-level drivers of cancer incidence, mortality, and resilience within this demographic. Read more about the study at voices.cancer.org.

40 Percent of Cancer Cases and Almost Half of All Deaths Linked to Modifiable Risk Factors

Published in [CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians](#), ASC researchers found four in 10 cancer cases and about one-half of all cancer deaths in adults 30 years old and older in the U.S. (or 713,340 cancer cases and 262,120 cancer deaths in 2019) could be attributed to modifiable risk factors, including cigarette smoking, excess body weight, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, diet, and infections. The study underscores the importance of implementing comprehensive tobacco control policies to promote smoking cessation, among other interventions, such as those that help maintain a healthy body weight and diet, to reduce the number of cancer cases and deaths in the country.

Generation X and Millennials Have Higher Risk of Developing 17 Cancers

ACS researchers published a paper in [The Lancet Public Health](#) suggesting incidence rates have continued to rise in younger generations for 17 of the 34 cancer types, including breast, pancreatic, and gastric cancers. These findings expanded on previous studies of early-onset colorectal cancer and a few obesity-associated cancers to encompass a broader range of cancer

types. Researchers don't yet have a clear explanation for why these rates are rising, but post-Baby Boomer generations share unique social, economic, political, and climate environments, which affect their exposure to cancer risk factors during their crucial developmental years.

Discrimination Faced by the LGBTQ+ Community May Lead to Increased Cancer Risk

ACS researchers completed a special report, "[Cancer in People who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Gender-nonconforming \(LGBTQ+\)](#)," which found that unique stressors and discrimination likely increase cancer risk among LGBTQ+ individuals. LGBTQ+ individuals experience multiple barriers to high-quality healthcare access, such as shortfalls in provider knowledge of their unique medical needs. Perhaps the greatest health disparity faced by LGBTQ+ communities is the presumption-of-care gap, which is the fear that a provider will refuse care due to gender identity or sexual orientation. Twenty percent of the LGBTQ+ community in the U.S. reside in the nine states where it is legal to refuse care due to "conscience clauses" based on personal and religious beliefs.

Ongoing Financial Toxicity Studies:

Throughout the year, ACS published important research observing the relationship between cancer diagnosis and adverse financial events, including lack of adequate insurance coverage:

- Published in the [Journal of Clinical Oncology \(JCO\)](#), a study led by ACS scientists and the National Cancer Institute showed more than one-third of cancer patients had a major adverse financial event (AFE) – bankruptcy, lien, or eviction – before their cancer diagnosis, and had a later-stage diagnosis compared with patients with no events. Researchers noted that not only do patients with a previous AFE face a greater likelihood of advanced disease, but they also may encounter substantial barriers to receiving recommended care and experience worse health outcomes for their newly diagnosed cancer because of their pre-existing financial vulnerability.
- Findings published in [CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians](#) highlighted the lasting financial impact of a cancer diagnosis for many working-age U.S. adults and their families. ACS researchers found that financial hardship arising from a cancer diagnosis goes beyond the rising costs of cancer care alone. A cancer diagnosis can result in employment disruptions, loss of household income, and loss of employment-based health insurance coverage. Nearly 60% of working-age cancer survivors report at least one type of financial hardship, such as being unable to afford medical bills, distress, or delaying or forgoing needed care because of cost.

- Presented at this year's American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting, a [study](#) led by ACS researchers showed continued cancer underdiagnosis and declines in early-stage diagnoses nationwide in 2021 during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. These patterns were worse among states without expanded Medicaid eligibility during the public health emergency, suggesting a protective effect of Medicaid expansion on cancer early diagnosis.
- Published in the [Journal of the National Cancer Institute \(JNCI\)](#), a large study led by ACS researchers found that lack of health insurance coverage accounts for a significant proportion of racial and ethnic disparities in advanced-stage diagnosis of multiple cancers. Researchers emphasized the role of health insurance coverage as a key factor in determining access to high-quality care, from cancer prevention to early detection to cancer treatment and survivorship, in the U.S. They also noted the findings could inform appropriate policies geared towards increasing coverage of health insurance for all populations.

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