

Health-Related Social Needs Linked to Higher Risk of Death for Cancer Survivors

Food insecurity and worry about paying for housing and other necessities were associated with higher mortality.

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A new study by researchers at [the American Cancer Society](#) (ACS) found health-related social needs (HRSN), such as food insecurity and financial worry about paying for housing-related expenses and other living necessities, were associated with higher mortality risk among cancer survivors ages 18 to 64.

Cancer survivors often face substantial out-of-pocket medical costs, which can adversely affect many aspects of their financial well-being and day-to-day living expenses and require trade-offs between paying for medical care and other expenses. The findings [were] presented at this year's [annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology \(ASCO\)](#) in Chicago, June 2-6.

Scientists, led by [Dr. Zhiyuan Zheng](#), senior principal scientist of health services research at the American Cancer Society, reviewed data from the 2013-2018 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and NHIS-linked mortality files to identify cancer survivors. They examined how HRSN and medical financial hardship were associated with mortality risk among cancer survivors. Food insecurity (e.g., worry about food running out) and financial worries (i.e. paying for housing, monthly bills, and other living necessities) were separately summarized and categorized as severe, moderate, and minor/no levels.

Nearly 17% of cancer survivors ages 18 to 64 years and 7.3% of cancer survivors ages 65 to 79 years reported moderate to severe food insecurity. Moderate to severe non-medical financial worries were more widespread, affecting more than a third of cancer survivors ages 18 to 64 years.

HRSNs were associated with increased mortality risk among cancer survivors ages 18 to 64 years, even after controlling for the effects of medical financial hardship. Among the older population, associations between HRSNs were statistically insignificant, but medical financial hardship was significantly associated with increased mortality risk, suggesting different trade-offs between younger cancer survivors and older cancer survivors who are age-eligible for Medicare health

insurance coverage.

The authors of the study suggest a standardized and comprehensive assessment of health-related social needs and medical financial hardship to identify and mitigate the adverse economic impacts of cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Click here to ready the [study abstract](#).

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