



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center



The employer blueprint for cancer support benefits

Key findings and actions

Summary

The U.S. is projected to see over 2 million new cancer cases in 2025, with a significant percentage affecting working age people.¹ These diagnoses are rising among younger populations,² resulting in higher absenteeism, escalating healthcare costs, and a greater need for comprehensive support.

Advances in cancer care are improving survival, but long-term treatment effects are straining employee wellbeing and employer resources. With rising impacts on productivity, costs, and workforce stability, cancer support benefits are now a critical, urgent priority for employers.

To better support employers and their workforce, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK), in partnership with Ipsos, conducted both quantitative and qualitative surveys with executive decision-makers and HR benefits leaders to better understand how employer and union leaders view and utilize cancer support benefits. These findings help paint a clearer picture of the current landscape of cancer support programs.

The study delivers a clear message: **employers have a meaningful opportunity to strengthen support for employees affected by cancer.** By providing better education, enhanced resources, and a demonstrated commitment to connecting employees with the highest quality care, employers can better meet the needs of those facing cancer.

Key findings include:

1 Unmet need

50%

of surveyed employers who **do not offer** cancer support benefits recognize the importance and agree they should be prioritized.

2 Knowledge gap

61%

of surveyed employers who **do not offer** cancer support benefits view them as too costly. These employers often lack a clear understanding of what these benefits entail, including their true costs and impact on clinical outcomes.

3 Proven value

57%

of surveyed employers **offering** cancer support benefits report faster recovery times and value the access to cutting-edge treatments and top cancer experts.

¹ American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2025. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2025. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2025/2025-cancer-facts-and-figures-acf.pdf>

² Piersol, Bill. "The Latest Research on Why so Many Young Adults Are Getting Cancer." Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, 16 Jan. 2025. www.mskcc.org/news/why-is-cancer-rising-among-young-adults





“In the next 5 years, cancer could significantly impact our workforce by increasing healthcare costs, affecting employee productivity, and requiring more comprehensive support systems.”

—Surveyed Benefits Leader

Methods

Ipsos, a global market research company, conducted a comprehensive mixed-methods study from December 20, 2024, to January 29, 2025. Ipsos surveyed benefits leaders and C-suite decision-makers across a variety of industries in the United States for Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK).

This study surveyed 1,000 HR benefits leaders and decision makers age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska, and Hawaii. The interviews were conducted online in English. This poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.8 percentage points for all respondents. The study also includes qualitative insights from 39 in-depth interviews to gauge employer attitudes toward cancer support benefits. The research focused on evaluating adoption rates, barriers to implementation, and the perceived value of cancer support programs. More information on the methodology [here](#).

1,000
HR benefits leaders and decision makers surveyed

Respondents received the following definition of cancer support benefits:

An employer-sponsored cancer support benefit is typically an offering outside of health insurance that encourages cancer screenings, navigates employees and their dependents to in-person care at top cancer centers with the best outcomes, provides access to second opinions, and offers emotional support and guidance throughout one’s cancer journey.

Key findings

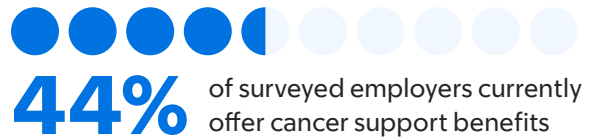
1

Unmet need: Bridging the gap to offering cancer support benefits

Despite the increasing cancer incidence in the working population, only 44% of surveyed employers currently offer cancer support benefits.

Several perceived barriers to adoption are contributing to this coverage gap. Although cancer has surpassed musculoskeletal conditions as the leading driver of healthcare costs for employers,³ survey results indicate that many leaders remain focused on traditional benefits, such as Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) unpaid leave, or other added benefits like mental health support.

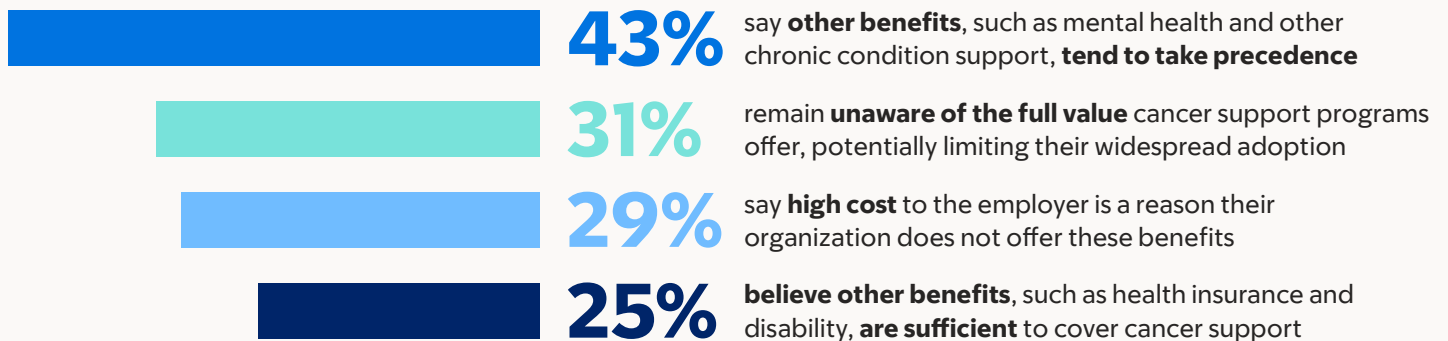
However, the growing threat of cancer is becoming more urgent, with four in 10 surveyed employers *without cancer support benefits* acknowledging the need to implement such programs in the near future.



Takeaway

Cancer support benefits, such as MSK Direct, are critical to employee wellbeing and organizational performance. Yet, perceived barriers continue to hinder adoption. Removing these obstacles is a strategic imperative to strengthen workforce health and productivity.

Top barriers to adoption for employers *without cancer support benefits*:



“Morally, it’s the right thing to do. Financially, it’s challenging. The benefit is helping our people recover and showing them we care.”

—Surveyed Benefits Leader

³ Business Group on Health. (2023, April 6). 2023 Large Employers' Health Care Strategy and Plan Design Survey [Press release]. Business Group on Health. <https://www.businessgrouphealth.org/en/newsroom/news-and-press-releases/press-releases/2023-lehcspsds>



Knowledge gap: Opportunity to increase awareness for employers *without* cancer support benefits

Survey results indicate there is an opportunity to provide increased education around the importance of providing access to high-quality care. Only 41% of surveyed employers without cancer support benefits strongly agree these benefits give employees a better chance at positive outcomes, such as improved quality of life and survivorship.

Additionally, only three in 10 surveyed employers *without cancer support benefits* strongly agree that getting treated at a “Cancer Center of Excellence” improves patient outcomes, including survival and less invasive treatments. Yet, studies show that treatment at National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers may be associated with improved outcomes, particularly for patients with more severe illnesses or more advanced cancers.⁴ These centers are at the forefront of cancer research, offering cutting-edge treatments and clinical trials that may not be available elsewhere.

Only 41%

of surveyed employers *without cancer support benefits* strongly agree these benefits give employees a better chance at positive outcomes

Takeaway

The data indicates a clear gap in understanding the full value of cancer support benefits. Many employers still underestimate how early diagnosis, access to expert care, and treatment at an NCI-designated Cancer Center of Excellence, such as MSK, can significantly improve outcomes, reduce long-term complications, and lower healthcare costs.



Only 3 in 10

surveyed employers **without cancer support benefits** strongly agree that getting treated at a “Cancer Center of Excellence” improves patient outcomes



⁴ Wolfson JA, Sun CL, Wyatt LP, Hurria A, Bhatia S. Impact of care at comprehensive cancer centers on outcome: Results from a population-based study. *Cancer*. 2015 Nov 1;121(21):3885-93. doi: 10.1002/cncr.29576. Epub 2015 Jul 28. PMID: 26218755; PMCID: PMC4892698.



Proven value: Impact on outcomes for employers that offer cancer support benefits

This study found that employers who utilize cancer support benefits favorably view the health impacts the benefits provide. For example, 57% of surveyed employers offering cancer support benefits report that these programs help employees get back on their feet quicker, and over half agree a positive impact is that they provide access to top doctors and innovative treatments.

Access to high-quality care is crucial because accurate diagnoses lead to precise treatments, reducing complications and costs while enabling employees to make well-informed decisions about their care. Access to subspecialized care, second opinions, and tools such as risk assessments, genetic testing, and evidence-based screenings help identify high-risk employees before symptoms appear, allowing for timely interventions.

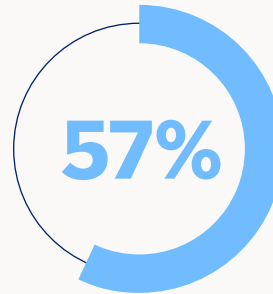
Furthermore, cancers caught early are often more treatable, less costly, and less disruptive to work life.

Early-stage treatment can cost up to seven times less than late-stage care.⁵ Prevention and early detection—which are helped made possible through comprehensive access—can reduce time away from work, can reduce available costs from late diagnoses, and can lower the impact of long-term disability or leave.

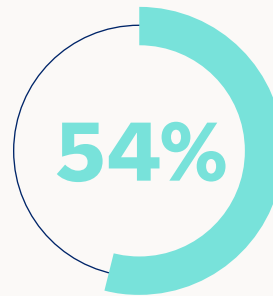
Takeaway

Employers that offer cancer support benefits, such as MSK Direct, report faster recovery, enhanced access to specialized care, and better outcomes—delivering measurable value to both employees and the organization.

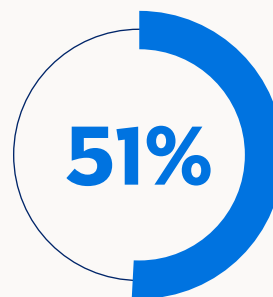
Of surveyed employers offering cancer support benefits:



report that these programs **help employees get back on their feet quicker**



agree a positive impact is that they **provide access to top doctors**



agree a positive impact is that they **provide access to innovative treatments**

⁵ Reddy SR, Broder MS, Chang E, Paydar C, Chung KC, Kansal AR. Cost of cancer management by stage at diagnosis among Medicare beneficiaries. *Curr Med Res Opin.* 2022 Aug;38(8):1285-1294. doi:10.1080/03007995.2022.2047536. Epub 2022 Apr 20. PMID: 35285354.



Recommendations

Why it matters for employers

Investing in cancer support benefits isn't just about healthcare; it's about employers and union fund leaders protecting their workforce and members, reducing costs, and reinforcing their company's values. Organizations that prioritize early diagnosis, access to top quality subspecialized care, and holistic employee support will be better positioned to navigate the growing challenges posed by cancer in the workplace.

A robust cancer support benefit should:

Build programs and benefits around **clinical excellence**.

Prioritize **early diagnosis and intervention** to mitigate the risks of late-stage diagnoses.

Ensure employees have **access to top-tier cancer specialists** early on, preventing misdiagnosis and unnecessary treatments.

Provide **holistic care and support** addressing both physical and mental health needs.

How to take action:

1

Ensure you have a screening and prevention strategy and provide employees with access to resources that help identify cancer risk and educate them on necessary screenings.

2

Provide second opinions for cancer that are accessible, convenient for employees, and have no member cost share, whenever feasible.

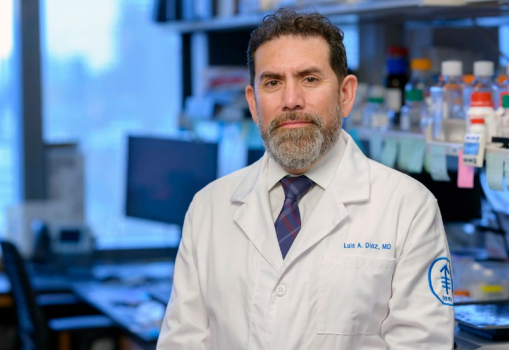
3

Offer easy, expedited access to subspecialty expertise. Consider implementing cancer support benefits that provide guidance and connection to clinical care with the best outcomes.

4

Evaluate and implement a Cancer Center of Excellence network and cover travel costs for those seeking treatment at these centers.





About MSK Direct

Empowering employers to support their workforce impacted by cancer

Introduced in 2016 by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK), MSK Direct was designed to transform how employers support employees affected by cancer. Built on MSK's legacy of clinical excellence in cancer care, this innovative solution provides streamlined access to one of the world's leading cancer centers—enabling organizations to deliver expert, high-impact care during one of the most critical and challenging times in an employee's life.

For benefits leaders and executive teams focused on workforce health and measurable impact, MSK Direct is a solution that delivers what matters most: giving your employees the best possible chance to beat cancer.

From research to results: How MSK Direct delivers

Backed by MSK's unmatched clinical expertise and outcomes, MSK Direct enhances your benefits strategy.

- ✓ Integrates directly with your organization's existing health insurance plan at no additional cost to your company.
- ✓ Access to MSK's world-renowned subspecialty physicians, through in-person care or expert medical second opinions.
- ✓ As an NCI-designated cancer center, MSK consistently outperforms national benchmarks—delivering higher survival rates across all cancer types and stages.
- ✓ MSK Direct includes targeted member outreach and personalized cancer prevention tools, which promote earlier detection and intervention.

Connect with MSK Direct

844.557.5507 | mskdirectinfo@mskcc.org | msk.org/mskdirect



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center