New ACS Study Finds Unmet Social Needs Linked to Low Trust in Cancer Information From Health Professionals

ATLANTA, August 20, 2025 — In a new study led by the American Cancer Society (ACS), scientists found that unmet social needs of adults in the United States were associated with a substantial reduction in trust of cancer information from doctors and the healthcare system. Unmet social needs included insecurity in housing, food, and/or transportation access, which affect health and well-being. The study is published today in the journal *Psycho-Oncology.*

“Public trust in health authorities is so essential because it influences uptake of health recommendations like routine cancer screening and vaccination,” said Dr. Jordan Baeker Bispo, principal scientist, cancer disparity research at the American Cancer Society, and lead author of the study. “Social inequality is an important driver of medical mistrust. These findings are important as we need to better understand this dynamic in the context of cancer information sharing and cancer control.”

Researchers examined data from the 2022 Health Information National Trends Survey. The main exposure was the number of unmet social needs (0, 1 or 2 or more) tabulated from survey items on housing, transportation, and food insecurity. Dependent variables included binary indicators of trust (high vs. low) in cancer information from doctors, scientists, and government agencies, and trust in the healthcare system overall. Associations were evaluated using survey-weighted multivariable logistic regression with adjustment for sociodemographic characteristics.

Study results showed that doctors were the most trusted source of cancer information (72.6%), followed by scientists (56.9%) and government agencies (29.2%). Unmet social needs were associated with reduced trust in cancer information from doctors; in adjusted models, the odds were 39% lower for respondents with one unmet need, and 51% lower for those with two or more unmet needs compared to those with none. A minority (36.1%) of respondents reported high trust in the healthcare system overall, with 61% lower odds among those with equal to or less than two unmet needs.

“Addressing social needs in the clinical setting may enhance patient trust in cancer messaging from providers,” Baeker Bispo added. “Many health systems have adopted social needs screening programs to help patients access the resources they need beyond the clinic walls. These programs could have a positive downstream impact on communication about cancer control by enhancing the trustworthiness of providers and health systems at large.”

“Evidence shows that patient navigation can bridge a number of gaps and address diverse needs across patient populations. When it comes to cancer care, patient navigation offers support to manage and traverse an often overwhelming and scary prognosis by increasing understanding of treatment options,” said Lisa A. Lacasse, president of ACS’s advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN).

Other ACS researchers contributing to the study include Jessica Star, MPH, Dr. Ahmedin Jemal, and senior author Dr. Farhad Islami.

Additional ACS Resources:

- Social Support Linked With Improved Cancer Screening in U.S.
- Cancer Treatment and Survivorship Statistics, 2025
- Health-Related Social Needs Associated With Higher Risk of Death for Cancer Survivors

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as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

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