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# American Cancer Society addressing inequities in care with new multichannel navigation support program

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RECOMMENDED

Cancer patients can benefit by having access to others with cancer treatment experience who can help them understand their own treatment. ISTOCK

By Laura Newpoff - Contributor  
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Nearly 2 million people are expected to be diagnosed with cancer this year and many of them will perceive the health care system as being so complex, they won't know how to begin their treatment journey.

Much like a Sherpa is needed to help an inexperienced climber hike a mountain for the first time, cancer patients can benefit by having access to others with cancer treatment experience and knowledge who can help them understand their cancer treatment and be engaged in care decisions.

That was true for Steve Forrest who, hours after receiving a metastatic cancer diagnosis, learned his wife was in cardiac arrest and being treated in the emergency room.

"We had no time to process anything that was happening," Forrest said. "While we were in the ICU, our patient navigator came to our rescue. She helped me quickly get an appointment with an oncologist who could best suit my needs. Next, she went to appointments with me and helped me sort out the overwhelming amount of information."

Since his wife couldn't be with him for doctor's appointments and treatments, Forrest found comfort knowing someone who cared was helping him navigate his care through this challenging time.

"She guided me through the treatment process and was there when I rang the bell after my last chemo treatment," he said. "My patient navigator was a blessing to me."



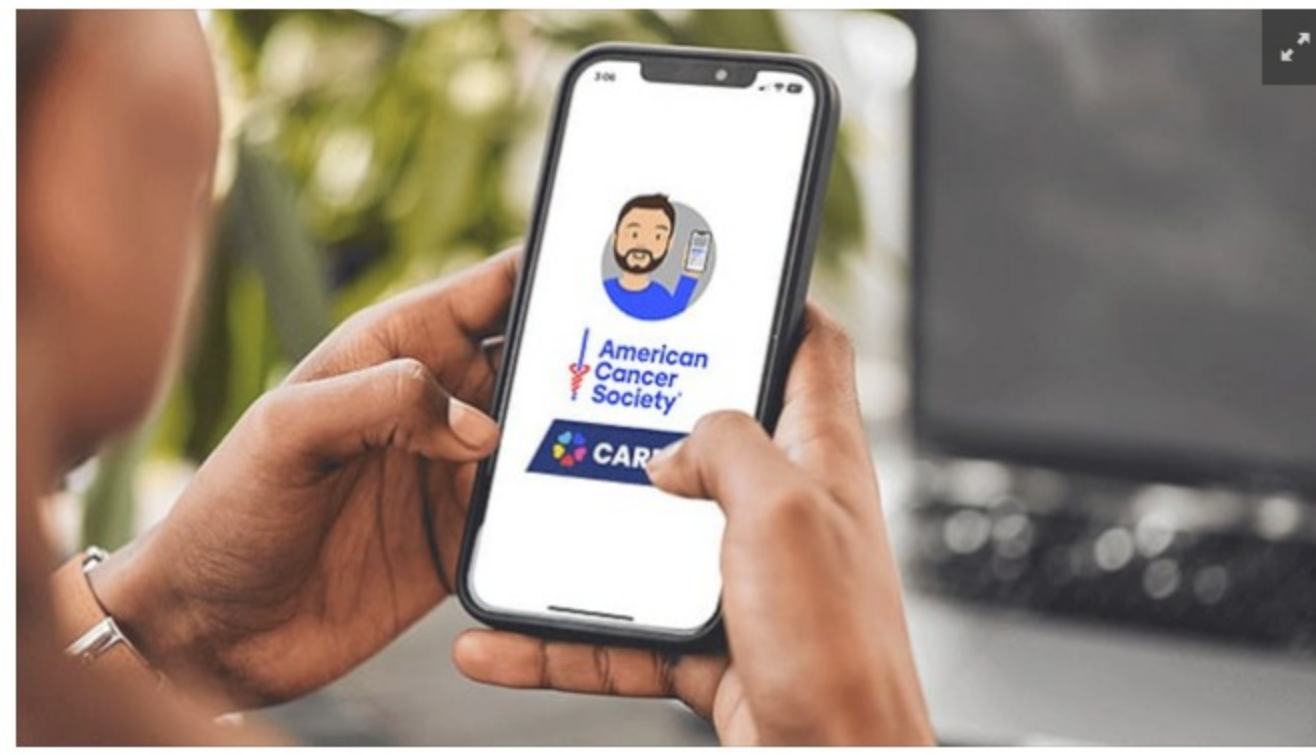
Since Steve Forrest's wife couldn't be with him for doctor's appointments and treatments, Forrest, shown left, found comfort knowing someone who cared was helping him navigate his care.

That's why the American Cancer Society (ACS) unveiled a new cancer care navigation program this summer called ACS CARES (Community Access to Resources, Education and Support). It equips those facing cancer with curated information, resources and patient navigation support personalized to their specific cancer journey.

Funding from the Deloitte Health Equity Institute (DHEI) will help the American Cancer Society expand the program to accelerate nationwide deployment of ACS CARES and address health disparities, with a focus on engaging underserved communities.

"ACS CARES is a resource available to everyone to help promote health equity and reduce disparities to make sure historically underserved communities and populations are getting access to the resources and care they need," said Dr. Arif Kamal, chief patient officer at ACS. "This is about people feeling engaged and being a part of their improved outcome story."

The new program comes as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is finalizing rules that allow payment for "principal illness navigation" services to help patients navigate treatment for cancer and other serious illnesses. Reimbursing these navigators for the first time will be one of the "biggest shifts in cancer care delivery ever," Kamal said.



ACS CARES is the first-ever nationwide nonclinical multichannel navigation support program that equips those facing cancer with curated content, programs, and services to fit their specific cancer journey.

## How ACS CARES works

ACS CARES is one of the countless ways the cancer nonprofit is working to fulfill its mission to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. The novel multichannel cancer navigation support program is the first-ever nationwide nonclinical effort of its kind. The vision is for ACS CARES to become the benchmark "start here" program and digital application for the 1.9 million newly diagnosed cancer patients and 18 million cancer survivors in the U.S.

The program uses an assessment tool to identify a person with cancer or caregiver's needs and deliver curated content and resources accordingly via three channels:

- **Customized guidance.** By downloading a digital app, patients and caregivers can receive personalized information and resources that update them as they age, as their situation changes, or as new information becomes available.
- **Access to information.** Patients and caregivers have 24/7 access to receive over-the-phone support from trained ACS staff.
- **Support system.** Virtual support from trained ACS community volunteers is available within the ACS CARES app, along with in-person support from ACS volunteers embedded in oncology clinics. In-person volunteers are available at three health care systems in 2023 and an additional nine in 2024.

"Each of our ACS programs and services offers unique benefits to individuals across the cancer continuum," Kamal said. "They are designed to meet people when and where they need help and in the way each individual prefers to communicate."

ACS can offer such programs thanks to collaborations like the one with DHEI. With this collaboration, ACS and DHEI hope to achieve three objectives together over two years to help patients at the community level.

- Increase multicultural engagement with ACS navigation programs.
- Accelerate nationwide deployment of the ACS CARES app.
- Increase recruitment of college student navigators across historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and rural health systems.

The multicultural aspect of the program is important to DHEI, said Dr. Jay Bhatt, managing director of the Deloitte Health Equity Institute and Center for Health Solutions.

"DHEI is collaborating with ACS to help scale the ACS CARES app nationwide to support patients throughout the care continuum with solutions at the root causes of health inequities," he said. "Our collaboration is enabling a focus on increasing multicultural engagement with ACS navigation. Purpose-driven collaborations like this one bring tangible tools centered in human experiences to patients and align to our goal of health equity as an outcome."

"Health equity is a moral and business imperative," Bhatt said. "Every organization, across every industry, can play a role in making health more equitable - within their organizations, and in the communities they serve. Health equity should be everybody's business."

"Cancer affects many of us, including our own professionals and families," Bhatt continued. "We are pleased to collaborate with ACS in bringing an innovative, tech-enabled approach to the patient experience, blending relevant content, staff-assisted navigation and virtual/in-person support. ACS's personalized approach, leveraging community relationships, allows us to, together, drive impact on a national scale."

*Business leaders who want to learn more about ACS CARES and how they can help make an impact in addressing inequities in cancer care can visit [cancer.org/becomepartner](https://cancer.org/becomepartner).*

*Laura Newpoff is a freelance writer with The Business Journals Content Studio.*

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