



Road to Survivorship: Emergency Preparedness for Low-Income Populations Along the Cancer Continuum

There are approximately **18.6 million cancer survivors living in the United States**.¹ Cancer survivors includes anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer, including both people who are undergoing treatment and who have finished treatment.² During an emergency, cancer survivors, especially those with low incomes, may have additional needs, but preparation—both at an individual level and a community level—can help them stay healthy.

1 in 70 U.S. adults are displaced from their homes each year because of an emergency.³
88.5% of U.S. counties declared at least one natural disaster between 2013 and 2023.⁴



After a disaster:³
1 in 3 emergency survivors report food insecurity and being displaced for a month or more.

Road before awareness



STEP 1 INCREASE EMERGENCY AWARENESS:

States, counties/parishes, and communities can increase emergency awareness and better support cancer survivors with the following steps:

- **Know what types of emergencies could happen:** [The National Risk Index](#) can help identify local risk.
- **Understand cancer statistics in your community:** By learning how many cancer survivors live in a community, planners can understand where resources are needed most. [U.S. Cancer Statistics](#) data can help identify local cancer rates.
- **Understand the needs of cancer survivors:** Cancer survivors may have high rates of comorbidities, like heart disease and type 2 diabetes; side effects from treatment, such as neuropathy or lymphedema; or visible or invisible disabilities, like limb amputation or vision or hearing loss.



Community Resilience and Healthy People 2030 Goals

Community resilience is a community's ability to respond and recover quickly after a disaster. Improving community resilience is important for national health, and emergency preparedness is part of **Healthy People 2030** goals, including:⁶

- Increasing the proportion of adults who have an emergency plan for disasters,
- Increasing the proportion of adults who know how to evacuate in case of a hurricane, flood, or wildfire,
- Increasing the proportion of local jurisdictions (e.g., counties) that have a health improvement plan, and
- Increasing the proportion of state and territorial jurisdictions that have a health improvement plan.



STEP 2 BUILD A FOUNDATION OF HEALTH:

The following steps can help build a foundation of health at the state, county/parish, and community level across the cancer continuum:

- **Promote regular health screenings:** Regular health screenings can detect cancers, high blood pressure, high blood glucose levels, and other conditions early, when they are most treatable. Communities that offer regular health screenings establish themselves as trusted partners in health.
- **Empower follow up after abnormal screenings:** Removing barriers to follow-up care after an abnormal health screening is crucial for community health.
- **Share resources to address food security:** Access to healthy foods is an important part of cancer treatment and survivorship. For people diagnosed with cancer, healthy foods are especially important to maintain health and help prevent and address comorbidities.



STEP 3 ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN EMERGENCY PLANS:

State and county/parish governments, healthcare, organizations, nonprofit organizations, community based-organizations, and worksites can empower cancer survivors through emergency plans by adopting the following steps:

- **Incorporate populations diagnosed with cancer and other chronic diseases as a priority area in emergency plans:** The needs of populations diagnosed with cancer should be included in state plans (e.g., State Cancer Plans, State Health Improvement Plans), Community Health Improvement Plans, and Community Health Needs Assessments. A few examples of resources are included in the Support Services and Emergency Preparedness Resources list.
- **Ensure that emergency preparedness plans include community engagement strategies:** To meet the needs of the community and to ensure better implementation, emergency plans should incorporate and involve multi-sector partners and organizations.
- **Review and update emergency plans at least once per year:** This is especially important in medically underserved areas and health professional shortage areas, as emergency resources might be scarce.
- **Remind people to account for transportation and housing during an emergency:** Many nonprofits offer transportation and housing assistance for people diagnosed with cancer and other chronic diseases. Share a list of nonprofits and helplines (as listed on this infographic) that can serve as resources during an emergency.
- **Raise awareness of the need for emergency plans:** Free resources, like Ready.gov's [Make a Plan](#) site, can help people prepare for a range of emergencies. Communities can provide lists of items to include if people have to leave their homes and share how to think through potential needs. Emergency plans should account for a person's medications, therapies, and any [disabilities](#) they may have. Plans should also include ways to get in touch with healthcare providers during an emergency.
- **Emphasize knowing your health history:** During an emergency, a person with a history of cancer [needs to have the details of their cancer and their treatments](#) and should have an [emergency care plan](#).



Emergency Planning: Churches and Other Faith-based Organizations

Community engagement is essential throughout all phases of emergency. Churches and faith-based organizations can play an important role in sharing information by:

- **Hosting an emergency preparedness class, session, or event.** Churches can invite first responders, local federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, local health departments, community action agencies, transportation sectors, and other emergency organizations to discuss emergency preparedness with community members.
- **Incorporating emergency preparedness in community resource guides** to include resources and services to address food access and insecurity and other social drivers of health.
- **Incorporating emergency preparedness information in church bulletins** to share information about emergency preparation classes and resources.



STEP 4 WORK THE PLAN AFTER AN EMERGENCY:

- **Connect cancer survivors with care:** Before, during and after an emergency, cancer survivors may need to maintain care or contact their healthcare team. Connect survivors with free local resources and helplines to help them find care during an emergency.
- **Connect cancer survivors with housing, transportation, and food:** Free support services can connect cancer survivors with necessities before, during, and after an emergency. Share helplines, housing, and transportation options, including open disaster [shelters](#), as needed.



References

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3. Rumbach A and McTarnaghan S. More Than 3 Million Americans Were Displaced by a 'Natural' Disaster in the Past Year. How Can We Prepare for Our Climate Future? Urban Institute. Published November 15, 2023. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/more-3-million-americans-were-displaced-natural-disaster-past-year-how-can-we-prepare>
4. Gusner P. Natural Disaster Facts and Statistics 2025. Forbes. Audited January 3, 2025. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/homeowners-insurance/natural-disaster-statistics/>
5. Natural Hazards. FEMA. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/natural-hazards>
6. Emergency Preparedness. Healthy People 2030. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/emergency-preparedness>

Support Services and Emergency Preparedness Resources

Organization	Resource	Description
211	Disaster Recovery	Local disaster recovery information
Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response	Community Resilience	Guide to strengthening community resilience
American Cancer Society	24/7 Cancer Helpline	Free helpline (1-800-227-2345) with cancer resources
	ACS CARES	App with free cancer resources
	Road to Recovery	Free transportation services to medical appointments
	Hope Lodge	Program with temporary housing for people traveling for cancer care
American Diabetes Association	ADA Community Connections Resources Directory	Free tools to manage diabetes
American Heart Association	Healthy Living	Free resources to help manage heart disease
	Diabetes Tools and Resources	Free tools for people with diabetes and heart disease
American Hospital Association	CLEAR Field Guide for Emergency Preparedness	Emergency preparedness guide
	Tipsheets	List of free emergency preparedness tipsheets
American Lung Association	Lung HelpLine	Free helpline (1-800-586-4872; for hearing assistance: 1-800-501-1068) for people with lung conditions
	Financial Assistance Programs	List of financial assistance programs for people with lung cancer
	Patient and Caregiver Network	Online support program for people with lung cancer
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network	Call Center	Call center (1-833-275-4222) with support for people with bladder cancer
	Find Support	Support resources for people with bladder cancer
CancerCare	Financial Assistance Program	Financial assistance program for some cancer-related costs (e.g., transportation)
	Helpline	Helpline (1-800-813-4673) that connects people with oncology social workers
Cancer Financial Assistance Coalition	Find Assistance from Organizations Providing Financial or Practical Help	Search tool for cancer financial assistance resources
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)	Public Health Emergency Preparedness Connects Webinars <ul style="list-style-type: none">The National Incident Management System (NIMS): Guidance for Public Health CommunitiesStrengthening Community Resilience: Bridging Disaster Response and Behavioral Health	Free monthly webinars with emergency preparedness assistance and resources
	National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program	Program to connect people with low incomes or who are under- or uninsured with breast and cervical cancer screening
	Be Prepared for an Emergency	Tips on emergency preparation for people diagnosed with cancer
Colorectal Cancer Alliance	Helpline	Free helpline (1-877-422-2030) for people with colorectal cancer
	BlueHQ Patient Support Hub	Resource hub for people with colorectal cancer
	Blue Hope Financial Assistance Fund	Fund to help people with low incomes pay for colorectal cancer screening and treatment
Federal Emergency Management Agency	Engaging Faith-Based and Community Organizations: Planning Considerations for Emergency Managers	Guide on including faith-based and community organizations in disaster preparedness plans
HealthWell Foundation	Disease Funds	List of open funds for cancer care
Joe’s House	Resources	List of resources for people with cancer
Kansas Department of Health and Environment	Integrating Health Equity into Disaster Recovery Plans: A Guide for Local Emergency Planning Committees	Guide on building emergency plans with all people in mind
Minnesota Department of Health	How to Embed Health Equity in Emergency Preparedness	Guide on building emergency plans with all people in mind
Montana Department of Health and Human Services	Health Equity and AFN in PHEP: Updates from Montana PHEP	Presentation on access and functional needs during emergencies
Montana Public Health Institute	Building Resilient Communities: Supporting Populations with Access and Functional Needs in Montana PHEP	Guide on ensuring access and functional needs are met during emergencies
National Association of Community Health Centers	State Level Health Center Data and Maps	Maps with data on health centers, including patient, provider, and cost data
National Breast Cancer Foundation	National Mammography Program	Free breast cancer diagnostic services for people with low incomes
	Patient Navigation Program	Program that connects people with breast cancer patient navigators
	Patient Relief Program	Financial assistance program for people with breast cancer
National Cancer Institute	Cancer Information Service	Free help line (1-800-422-6237) and live chat, for emergencies
National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable	Resource Center	Resources to help improve colorectal cancer screening and care
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network	Patient and Caregiver Services	Helpline (1-877-272-6226) with case managers to support people with pancreatic cancer
Ready.gov	Low and No Cost Preparedness	Tips and resources for low-cost preparedness
	Ready in Your Language	Emergency preparedness resources in multiple languages
	People with Disabilities	Emergency preparedness resources for people with disabilities
SelfMade Health Network	Enhancing Emergency Preparedness Approaches for Low-Income Populations Along the Cancer Continuum: Free Cancer Support Services Available (Year-Round) for Your State, Patients, Employees, and Communities	2-part webinar series discussing free cancer support services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration	Disaster Technical Assistance Center	Free disaster technical assistance for emergency planners and responders
	Disaster Distress Helpline	24/7 hotline (1-800-985-5990) with disaster crisis counseling
Zero Prostate Cancer	Helpline	Free helpline (1-844-244-1309) for people with prostate cancer
	Financial Resources	List of organizations that provide financial resources for people with prostate cancer