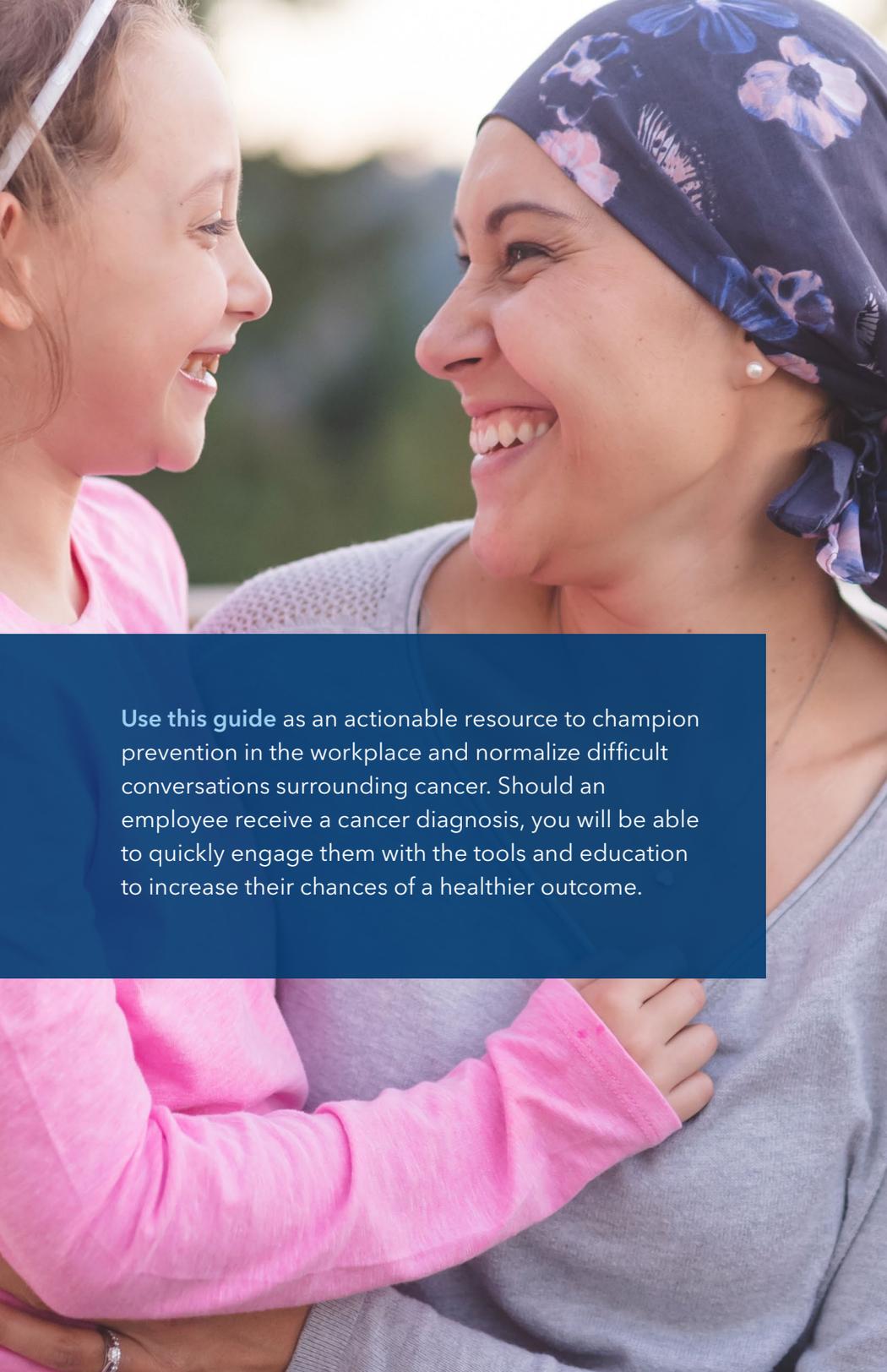




# Normalizing cancer conversations in the workplace

A holistic approach to caring for your employees – from prevention to survivorship



**Use this guide** as an actionable resource to champion prevention in the workplace and normalize difficult conversations surrounding cancer. Should an employee receive a cancer diagnosis, you will be able to quickly engage them with the tools and education to increase their chances of a healthier outcome.

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Imagine your employee, Mary, tells you she has stage 2 breast cancer. A flood of emotions rush in, and you feel speechless. Mary is the team member everyone relies upon, the problem solver. She's the kind of employee that rarely takes a sick day.

Mary continues: "I have to start chemo soon, but I can't afford to lose my job. And I don't want to let my team down." This is an overwhelming reality for everyone involved. How can you best support your valued employee during this difficult time? Read on to get answers to these difficult questions to better support Mary and every employee like her.





Statistically,  
1 in 3 women and  
1 in 2 men will get  
cancer in their lifetime  
so it's a situation  
that will likely affect  
your employees.<sup>1</sup>

## How does that impact your role?

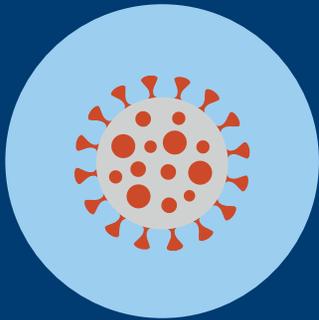
Employee expectations have changed. Business leaders are expected to care for their employees' well-being – putting health above profit so they can thrive physically and mentally.

Since cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S., it's smart business to have a complete cancer prevention strategy in place. This provides employees with peace of mind knowing you're prepared with an action plan to keep them healthy and allows you to act quickly.

**Foster a healthier workforce  
– from cancer prevention to survivorship**

Business leaders have a heroic opportunity to make a positive impact on the health of their employees. These small decisions can make a big difference in cancer prevention in the workplace and may save a life in the future. Savvy employers are taking proactive steps to protect their biggest investment – their people.





At the height of the pandemic in the U.S., routine cancer screenings declined by 90% leading to an estimated 9.4 million missed screenings from January to July 2020 alone.<sup>2</sup>

In a post-pandemic world, we are uncovering that COVID caused many to pause their health care needs. As screenings resumed, later-stage cancers were diagnosed; cancers that could have been caught before progressing had the pandemic not interrupted screenings.

Studies show that survival rates increase significantly when cancer is identified at early stages as a tumor can be addressed with less invasive forms of treatment.<sup>3</sup> The average 5-year survival rate for an array of cancers changes drastically between early-stage and later-stage cancers at 91% and 26% respectively.<sup>4</sup> These declines in the survival rate point to the power of prevention, screenings, and early diagnosis.

Luckily, several cancer types can be detected by routine screening leading to early detection so it's not just a gloomy reality. The lack of routine screenings leads to later diagnoses.

**But as a business leader, you can help.**



While the cancer mortality rate has been steadily declining over the past two decades, 80% of employers still say cancer is their top employee health care concern and cost driver.<sup>5</sup>

By building a supportive culture of cancer prevention and survivorship, you can retain a satisfied, loyal workforce that is proud to work for your organization, and avoid costly health care expenditures related to cancer.

Adopting a comprehensive cancer benefits plan for your organization – spanning prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship – is a choice you can feel good about while protecting the business. Annual health care costs are 2x as high for employees with a history of cancer.<sup>6</sup> Promoting employee well-being increases employees' quality of life, reduces work absences, and improves overall productivity.



52%

of employers' total cancer-related expenses are indirect<sup>7</sup> costs like absenteeism

Let's dig into lifestyle changes that impact cancer prevention and promote a healthier workplace.

## How to integrate health & well-being into your organization's culture

The strength of any organization lies in its people. If employees are healthy physically and emotionally they will be more efficient in their roles while helping to foster a culture of personal and professional growth. Organizations are starting to see the link between employee health and organizational performance, and launching company-wide well-being programs.



Inspire employees to prioritize self-care by discussing the importance of cancer screenings in preventing avoidable cancer diagnoses. A comprehensive health plan allows your employees to easily and cost-effectively stay on top of doctor's appointments they may otherwise put off. A plan that combines primary care screening in a medical office with convenient at-home screening kits is one way to support employees, no matter how busy they are.

We all know the link between leading an active, healthy lifestyle and decreasing the chances of a major illness. To empower healthier living among your workforce consider:

-  Incentivizing lunch hour walking or walking meetings
-  Prioritizing flexible hours for employees to manage their well-being
-  Developing social belonging among your employees
-  Encouraging team leads to support employees' personal needs
-  Offering employee award programs for healthy behaviors (steps, gym visits, self-trackers)

At least 42% of newly diagnosed cancers in the U.S. are potentially avoidable as prevention and early detection services are proven to decrease cancer risk – and improve outcomes.<sup>8</sup>



More than physical health, stress, anxiety, and depression can be destructive to your employees' lives. It's linked to high blood pressure, heart disease, sleep deprivation, and absenteeism to name a few. As a result, **62% of missed workdays are attributed to mental health conditions.**<sup>9</sup> Ensure your managers are trained to prioritize employee health over profit.

**To better support your workforce's mental health think about:**



Encouraging small breaks throughout the day to manage stress



Subsidizing virtual therapy programs such as BetterHelp



Ensuring employees schedule time-off and feel safe doing so



Motivating teams to eat lunch away from their computers



Leading workshops and activities that foster mental health awareness



### **Be a force for health in the workplace**

Inspire top and mid-level management to become champions of health by adding workshops to your ongoing leadership training and tools they can use to ease employees' concerns around cancer. Managers will be better equipped to handle difficult situations, and feel like valued allies in supporting workforce well-being. Committing to workplace wellness directly leads to better engagement, increased productivity, and above all else – loyalty.

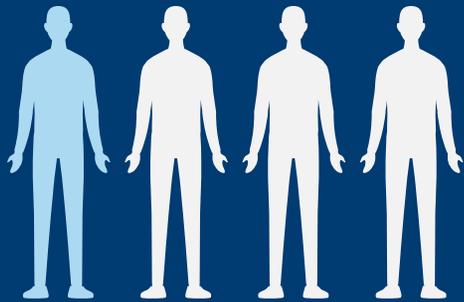


## Consider the toll of cancer on your employees' mental health

Recognize the emotional and mental health toll a cancer diagnosis can put on an employee. It's a life-changing and devastating event affecting your employees and their families. Even when treatment turns to survivorship, there are lingering mental health effects – uncertainty if cancer will return, balancing the guilt and accomplishment of surviving, or body image concerns post-treatment.

Give employees the mental health support to navigate everything from prevention to treatment and survivorship. Provide them with peace of mind so they can focus on their health because the journey doesn't end when treatment ends. To be a cancer survivor includes dealing with complex physical, emotional, and financial issues.





Mental health matters  
in specialty care  
because depression  
affects 1 in 4 people  
who have cancer.<sup>10</sup>

Make supporting those touched by cancer a priority by:



**Providing comprehensive mental health benefits**

A coordinated, 360-degree approach to cancer care provides a seamless treatment path and increases the chances of a healthier outcome.



**Educating survivors on their resources**

Provide information on external resources for counseling and ways to boost self-confidence such as free wigs or mastectomy products.



**Connecting survivors and their families**

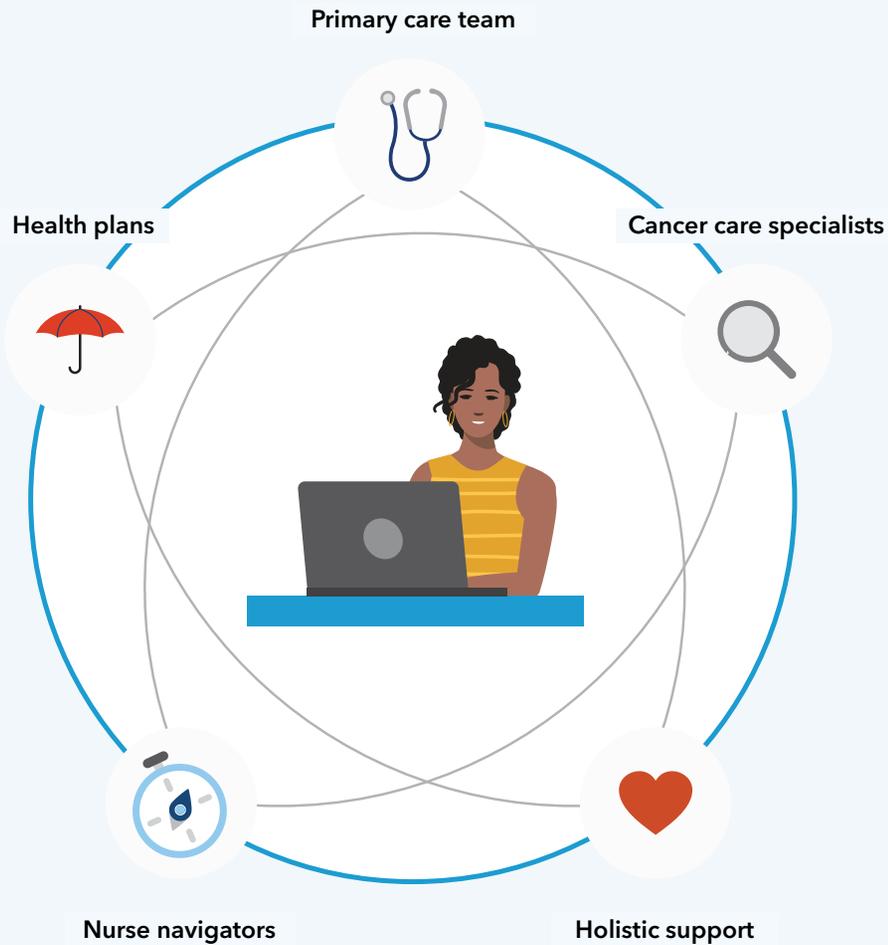
Pairing an employee recently diagnosed with cancer with an employee who has had a similar experience can be helpful.



**Creating a proactive, company-wide plan**

This provides employees with peace of mind about the next steps should they receive a cancer diagnosis while allowing you to act quickly.

Creating a cancer benefits strategy allows employers to answer such questions as how do I balance work and treatment, what my employer's policies are, and what do I do next? Above all else, allow for open communication so your employee can share where they are in their mental health journey and what they need going forward.



## Ensure employees have access to a 360-degree approach to cancer care

Providing a health care plan that offers an integrated approach to cancer care is one of the best ways to attract and retain top talent, improve employee productivity, and treat employees right. Treating serious conditions such as cancer represents a significant current and future cost challenge for those diagnosed

An integrated system has everything your employees need under one connected system to support:



**Better cancer prevention and earlier detection**



**Connecting survivors and their families**



**Faster recoveries and healthier outcomes**

## What to look for when selecting the best-in-class health benefits plan:



### Integrated model

When everything is available under one connected system, multidisciplinary teams are able to work together. Physicians can share their expertise, save time and visits, deliver better care, and achieve healthier outcomes. Cancer care is a team effort, and an integrated model supports that.

An integrated approach considers genetics as a part of a cancer prevention plan, which can point to the need for more frequent screenings, a preventive bilateral mastectomy to remove high-risk tissue, reconstructive surgery, or chemopreventive drugs. When health benefits are integrated, it gives the multidisciplinary care team a holistic view – putting employees at the center of the plan.



### Personalized care

Support your employees impacted by cancer with a personalized treatment plan. Opting for a cancer benefits strategy that connects to new, personalized approaches rather than a “one size fits all” plan ensures your employees have access to the most advanced cancer treatment innovations.

Since each cancer journey is unique, having a clearly defined strategy and roadmap for delivering high-value cancer care increases the chances of survival. Personalized vaccines, cell therapy, gene editing, and microbiome treatments are technologies that will change the way cancer is treated currently.



### Physician expertise

Providing treatment for cancer is different than for any other disease. Cancer is recognized not as one condition, but as multiple. With the emergence of genomic sequencing technology, cancer may soon be considered hundreds of conditions. Since cancer care is constantly evolving, ensuring your employees are diagnosed and treated by physicians that specialize in various types of cancer is essential to their health.

As one of the largest cancer care providers in the United States and a top enroller in National Cancer Institute-sponsored clinical trials, Kaiser Permanente doctors provide leading-edge care to our members.



### Clinical research

When first considering a cancer benefits plan for your employees, clinical research might not have been on the top of your list. Searching for a provider that actively conducts research in the ever-changing field of cancer allows them to enhance care delivery and improve outcomes. Clinical research can provide an opportunity to discover the most effective way of preventing, diagnosing, and treating cancer – decreasing the mortality rate and possibly eradicating it altogether.

The Kaiser Permanente Research Bank is one of the largest and most diverse biobanks in the world. This resource enables genomics and translational research that advances knowledge about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer.



### Cutting-edge, expert treatments

With the latest technologies and research, physicians can determine better diagnoses and treatment strategies tailored to each patient. One way is through the use of genome research and precision medicine. Physicians are able to use the genetic changes in a patient's tumor to determine the best clinical pathway.

Every year, researchers make advancements with clinical trials that give physicians new tools to fight tumors leading to treatment that may work better and cause fewer side effects. Kaiser Permanente is one of the largest enrolling sites in the nation for National Cancer Institute clinical trials. Members had access to over 200 cancer clinical trials in 2021.

The many ways you can support employee well-being have been discussed throughout this guide, **but the most substantial impact you can make boils down to a coordinated, 360-degree approach to cancer care.** This leads to better cancer prevention and earlier detection, the best defense against destructive late-stage cancers. Proactively caring for your employees' well-being is always a smart decision as a business leader.

**Interested in learning more?  
Let's talk!**

Contact us





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