

Bridging gaps in adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer care through multidisciplinary collaboration: A multistate education initiative

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BACKGROUND

Adolescents and young adults (AYAs), aged 15-39, often fall between pediatric and adult oncology care models, leading to critical gaps in prevention, screening, and survivorship care. A cancer diagnosis during this life stage disrupts identity development, education, employment, relationships, and family planning. AYAs frequently experience emotional distress, social isolation, and fragmented transitions between pediatric and adult care settings.

These challenges are often intensified in underserved communities where access to fertility preservation, mental health services, supportive care programs, and financial counseling may be limited. Oncology social workers and psycho-oncology professionals play a critical role in coordinating care, addressing psychosocial distress, supporting transitions, and connecting AYAs with resources.

To address these gaps, 3 state oncology societies launched a multistate initiative focused on improving AYA awareness, survivorship support, psychosocial care integration, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

METHODS

In spring 2025, participating state oncology societies conducted 8 focus groups and key informant interviews with:

- AYA oncology clinicians
- Social workers
- Genetic counselors
- Researchers
- Survivors and advocates
- Community leaders

Discussions explored:

- Psychosocial and supportive care gaps
- Care coordination challenges
- Barriers to survivorship transitions
- Distress screening implementation
- Social work and psycho-oncology integration
- Access disparities in underserved communities

Findings informed the development of:

- A national and state-level AYA resource library
- 2 educational webinars focused on early detection, psychosocial support, and multidisciplinary collaboration



To view all the resources developed from the AYA initiative, please scan the quick-response (QR) code or by visiting waho.accc-cancer.org/aya.

CONCLUSIONS

This multistate initiative demonstrated the importance of integrating psychosocial support and multidisciplinary collaboration into AYA oncology care.

Findings reinforced the critical role of oncology social workers and psycho-oncology professionals in improving survivorship transitions, reducing psychosocial distress, and addressing inequities in access to supportive care.

Building sustainable AYA survivorship models will require:

- Stronger oncology-primary care collaboration
- Trauma-informed and developmentally responsive care approaches
- Expanded psychosocial infrastructure
- Ongoing interdisciplinary education and advocacy

“Survivorship is more than just surviving. It is living with, through, and beyond cancer physically, psychologically, socially, economically, and spiritually.”
—Shelby Terstriep, MD
Medical Director, Sanford Cancer Survivorship Program
Sanford Health

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RESULTS

The initiative reaffirmed known challenges in AYA oncology while identifying several underrecognized psychosocial and survivorship needs.

Key Findings

- Fragmented coordination between pediatric and adult oncology systems
- Limited implementation of age-specific psychosocial distress screenings
- Inconsistent survivorship transition planning
- Barriers to fertility preservation and supportive care access
- Limited psychosocial staffing in community oncology settings
- Social isolation and identity-related distress among AYAs

Psychosocial & Social Work Themes

Participants emphasized the essential role of:

- Oncology social workers
- Psycho-oncology professionals
- Behavioral health teams

These professionals were identified as critical in:

- Coordinating care transitions
- Supporting treatment adherence
- Facilitating fertility and survivorship discussions
- Providing continuity across the cancer continuum
- Connecting patients with psychosocial and community resources

Equity & Access Challenges

Participants highlighted disparities affecting:

- Rural populations
- Racial and ethnic minority groups
- Uninsured and underinsured AYAs

Limited access to psychosocial services and fertility preservation often delayed supportive care interventions and increased distress.

Emerging Needs

Stakeholders identified several underrecognized areas requiring additional attention:

- Trauma-informed survivorship care
- Developmentally tailored psychosocial support-Peer connection opportunities
- PCP and community provider education
- Stronger multidisciplinary collaboration models