

Bridging Cancer Care and Community Mental Health: Supporting Patients and Clinicians Across the Cancer Trajectory

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Introduction

A cancer diagnosis can cause significant psychological distress, and for many patients, this distress continues throughout treatment and survivorship due to symptoms, side effects, and uncertainty. Unmet mental health needs can negatively affect quality of life and clinical outcomes, yet access to care is often limited by cost, geography, institutional resources, and systemic inequities that disproportionately affect minority populations (Mongelli et al., 2020; Seeburun et al., 2025).

Mental health services, especially when delivered through culturally competent and collaborative models, can improve treatment engagement, reduce stigma, and support better outcomes (Deshields & Asvat, 2023). Expanding resource navigation, community partnerships, and psychosocial support across the cancer continuum is essential to reducing disparities and meeting survivors' ongoing mental health needs (Bergerot et al., 2023; Russell et al., 2024).

There is a clear need to improve access to mental health care and resources for oncology patients. Through the Community Liaison Program, our aim is to address the needs of patients, agency clinicians, and the community. Programmatic goals include resource navigation and support for transition planning from our oncology center's mental health services to the community.

Program Aims

The Community Liaison Program is housed within Supportive Oncology and works closely with Social Work, Psychology, and Psychiatry. This program was created to address the systemic barriers patients and clinicians face in the transition to long-term mental health support once treatment is complete and patients move into survivorship. Our focus is on building more support through a collaborative network, regardless of where one practices. As our department and agency grow, there is a clear need for up-to-date and accurate regional resources.

An informal needs assessment was conducted with social workers to better understand pain points around referring patients to community therapists. The most common barriers identified were:
Administrative burden
Understanding health insurance
Need for specialized care (trauma, oncology, native language)
Up-to-date resources

Program Initiatives

Reduce the administrative strain through creating a centralized resource library for SW focused on understanding the mental health landscape regionally

Offer education opportunities for community mental health clinicians

Destigmatize mental health care through increasing access to accurate information and support

Offer one to one brief, targeted coaching for patients who are identified by their clinician with a significant barrier (ex: language, technology, cognitive, insurance) in transitioning to long term mental health support



How to Find Mental Health Care in Your Community

Cancer has more than a physical impact on people. Taking care of your mental and emotional health is an important part of your overall health. Mental health care may include talk therapy, medication, or both, and may last only a few sessions or may continue for longer. It is common to have a wide range of emotions and concerns when you or a loved one faces cancer.

How do I find a community mental health provider?

1. Call the customer service number on your insurance card or check their website to learn about your mental health benefits. Mental health services (also called behavioral health services) can range from \$0 to \$250 a visit, so most people use insurance to help pay. Find out:
 - what mental health services are covered
 - if you have a co-pay
 - how many sessions are covered under your plan
 - if there is a current list of allowed providers in your plan's network
 - the cost of services from a provider outside of your plan's network (sometimes less than paying without using insurance)
 - if you will be reimbursed for services from a provider outside of your plan's network
 - if you can use your flexible spending account (FSA) to pay for mental health services.

Some providers do not accept all insurance plans or bill to any insurance, so they may ask that you pay them directly. Sometimes a sliding scale (fee based on your ability to pay) is available.

2. Talk with your Dana-Farber care team or primary care provider (PCP). PCPs can address many mental health concerns as part of your care, including prescribing medications, and may know mental health professionals in your area. If your insurer offers a list of providers, ask if your PCP recommends any of them.

3. Contact your employer or school. Many employers offer confidential employee assistance programs that can provide short-term counseling and help to find a mental health professional. Schools often offer counseling services and can also help locate providers in your community.

4. Ask your community. You may get recommendations from trusted sources in your community. Friends, family, clergy, and local hospitals or community centers may be able to recommend a mental health provider.

5. Use referral services. Several online free services can help identify mental health providers with specific areas of expertise:
 - **Psychology Today** magazine sponsors an online searchable directory of mental health providers across the U.S. and in other countries. You may filter by insurance, patient age, and provider specialty. Visit www.psychologytoday.com and click on "Find a Therapist."
 - **Therapy Match** connects patients with licensed clinical social workers in Massachusetts. Visit www.therapymatcher.org. call 1-800-242-6794, or email info@therapymatcher.org.
 - **William James INTERFACE** is a telephone referral service for certain cities and towns in Massachusetts. It operates weekdays, 9 to 5. Its website lists additional mental health resources. Visit [http://www/interface.williamjames.edu/guidehelp](http://www.interface.williamjames.edu/guidehelp) or call 888-244-6943.

Social Work Resources

- Navigating the Teams Channel
- CEU and Trainings
- General Resources
- Mental Health
- Policy Pulse

Out of State Mental Health Crisis Response

For all states calling 988 is the first step for crisis support outside of calling 911. Nationwide 988 is operated by each region's designated crisis/community mental health agency and can provide linkage to crisis response services. It also offers confidential crisis counseling, mental health and substance use support, information and referrals 24/7. Support available in over 200 languages by phone, text/chat available in English and Spanish.

Clinicians and friends/family can also request mobile crisis response for individuals.

To contact 988: call or text 988, chat online at 988lifeline.org

State	Point of Contact in addition to 988	Resource breakdown
Connecticut	ACTION Line: 800-HOPE-135 or 211 (press 1 for crisis, 2 for adults)	Telephonic support, warm transfer to mobile crisis or emergency services. Team includes behavioral health clinician and peer support specialist. Additional crisis resource information.
Maine	Maine Crisis Line: 888-568-1112	Phone support, referrals to care, connection to mobile crisis team.
New Hampshire	Rapid Response Access Point at 833-710-6477	Phone support with referrals to outpatient care or connection to Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT).
New York	In NYC, mobile crisis referrals can be made online	NY State Mental Health Program Directory to locate services NAMI NY Helpline offers information, resources & support M-F 9a-3p by text/call

Lessons Learned

- We need a range of resources and approaches outside of therapy that help individuals feel like part of their community.
- It is beneficial to understand specific population demographics, as needs differ. This helps build targeted resources (e.g., age, cancer treatment, etc.).
- It is important to have clear communication and understanding of the implementation plan to ensure staff and patient buy-in.
- Are our priorities the same as the patient's? If not, how do we align our goals?

Next Steps

- * Educational programming for staff on health insurance coverage, specialty mental health services, and out-of-state/regional programming
- * Pilot a psychoeducational group for patients focused on reintegration and accessing support services beyond therapy/psychiatry
- * Conduct a needs assessment with community therapists to help shape the training and resource approach
- * Build partnerships with other agency oncology social workers to share resources, ideas, and tools to improve accessibility

References

Bergerot C, Jacobsen PB, Rosa WE, Lam WWT, Dunn J, Fernández-González L, Mehnert-Theuerkauf A, Veeriah S, Li M. Global unmet psychosocial needs in cancer care: health policy. *EClinicalMedicine*. 2024 Nov 16;78:102942. doi: 10.1016/j.eclinm.2024.102942. PMID: 39634034; PMCID: PMC11615525.

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Russell LE, Mitchell KM, Kennedy MA, Chrzas S, Lehmann LS, Silva JW, Moy E, Cohen AJ. Building Tailored Resource Guides to Address Social Risks and Advance Health Equity in the Veterans Health Administration. *Fed Pract*. 2024 Jan;41(1):22-28. doi: 10.12788/fp.0446. Epub 2024 Jan 15. PMID: 38835360; PMCID: PMC1147443.

Practice name	Phone number	Email	Website	State	In person	Telehealth	Age range	Specialty area	Accepting n
1 Chaya Massefski LICSW	617-870-4624	chaya@chmcounseling.com	www.chmcounseling.com	MA	No	yes	IFS	Email sent to re-verify	4/1/2
2 Marcos Rosenbaum LICSW	n/a	n/a	https://zencare.co/provider/ther	MA	Brookline	yes	Adult	Grief, transitions; attz	yes
3 Hadar Lutman LICSW	(978) 288-1926	hadar@andersonfan	https://www.psychologytoday.com	MA	No	yes	Adult	Trauma, DBT, family is no, waitlist	
4 Debra Amato LICSW	(339) 220-4455	n/a	Debra Amato, Clinical Social Wc	MA	No	yes	Adult	grief, transitions	yes
5 Essential Insights	(781-693-3200	hello@essentialinsig	https://www.essentialinsightssc	MA	Hudson	yes	Adult	Art, perinatal, addictive Yes, large gr	
6 Lisa M Wall, LICSW	413-230-2350	lisawallpsychotherap	www.lisawall.com	MA	No	yes	Adult	addiction, trauma, wo	yes
7 Center for Life Solutions	781-862-0890	n/a	https://www.ctrforsolutions.	MA	Lexington	yes	Adult	Trauma	yes
8 Deb Horton LICSW	n/a	dehortonlicsw@gn	Deb Horton Counseling Providr	MA, ME, OK, V	Deerfield, NH	yes	Adult	trans/gender diverse, Lyes	
9 Juliana Zee LICSW	508-406-9537	n/a	https://www.psychologytoday.com	MA	Plainville	yes	Adult	loss, medical illness, c, no, waitlist	
10 Optimal Health	508-679-9900	optimalhealthmbwci	Mental Health Counseling, Psyc	MA	Fall River	yes	All	therapy, medication n	yes
11 Stacey Kohler LICSW	508-570-5006	n/a	Stacey Kohler, Clinical Social WorkTherapist,	MA	no	yes	Adult	EMDR, hypnosis	yes with PCF
12 Boston Neurobehavioral Ass	508-979-5557	n/a	Participating Telehealth Provide	MA, NJ, RI, IL, I	New Bedford, Brockt	yes	All	ADHD, medication mayes	
13 Richer Soil Counseling	508-928-7555	nfo@richersoilsouns	Psychotherapy Richer Soil Cou	MA	Holden, Boylston	yes	All	couples, trauma, parer yes	
14 Like a Phoenix	781-205-4086	info@likeaphoenix.n	Like A Phoenix, Rising From The	MA	Woburn	yes	All	large group practice; p	yes
15 Carnea Counseling - Erica Jo	617-987-1844	Erica@CarneaCouns	www.CarneaCounseling.com	MA, NY	no	yes	Adult	anticipatory grief, loss	yes
16 Joshua Boyce LICSW	n/a	n/a	Joshua Boyce, LICSW LICSW - Ali	MA, CO, TN, IL	no	yes	Adult	loss, transition, traum	yes
17 Jessi Lawrence LICSW	n/a	413-610-3497	Jessi Lawrence, Clinical Social W	MA	Northampton	yes	Adult	psychodynamic	yes
18 Compassionate Counseling	774-218-5440	info@compassionati	Compassionate Counseling Con	MA, RI	Fall River	yes	All	trauma, groups, family yes	
19 Jessica Westenberg LICSW	857-217-2181	jessicawestenberg@	embodiedwellnesscollaborative.	MA	no	yes	Adult	DBT, IFS, relationship	yes