

As cancer deaths decline, access to care remains a challenge in some US communities

February 3 2023, by Alex Osiadacz



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Cancer remains the second-leading cause of death in the U.S., but the number of people dying from cancer continues to decline. In the last three decades, the overall rate of death from cancer has decreased 33%.

Data reported recently for 2019 and 2020 shows the trend continues.

The decline, according to various reports, is attributed to increased awareness around prevention, screening, [early diagnosis](#) and treatment of more common cancers.

Dr. Folakemi Odedina, deputy director of community outreach for Mayo Clinic's Comprehensive Cancer Center, says the news is worth celebrating, but there is still much work to be done.

"It is great news for people who are in the cancer community. Whether you are a scientist or a clinician, or a survivor, or a patient, or even an advocate, knowing that some of the work that we are doing is really making an impact is great—and a result of the collaboration of many—but we are not where we want to be," says Dr. Odedina.

The burden of cancer is significant. According to the American Cancer Society, almost 2 million new cancer diagnoses are expected this year. And more than 602,000 people died from cancer in 2020, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Even though we have declining [death rates](#), we still continue to see huge gaps and to see disparities in certain racial and ethnic minorities," notes Dr. Odedina. "In some communities, especially Black or Latino communities, and in parts of the Asian and Pacific Islander population, we see some significant disparities in the area of cancer. What that says to us is we still have a lot to do."

At Mayo Clinic's Comprehensive Cancer Center, teams are working daily to advance the science around new therapies and treatments, but, Dr. Odedina says, there is also an increased focus on minority community outreach. "It is important to be addressing cancer from a prevention perspective to reduce the risk of cancer, as well as the

diagnostic and screening components, but we need to build advocacy through collaboration and partnerships within the communities. And the Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center is doing it in a variety of ways."

One area of particular interest for Dr. Odedina is increasing minority representation in research. "We want to make sure these people are represented in our research as we aim to advance things further across the continuum of care," she says.

Personally, Dr. Odedina is focused on addressing inequities in [prostate cancer](#). Since 2014, she says, there has been a steady uptick in prostate cancer incidence, especially in Black men. This is particularly concerning since data from the American Cancer Society indicates a decline in the number of men overall diagnosed with cancer in the past five years.

"Prostate cancer affects men globally, but being of Black race is one of the [risk factors](#) for prostate cancer," says Dr. Odedina, adding that Black men have a 50% increased risk, with 1 in 6 men developing prostate cancer in their lifetime.

While there may be social, environmental and other [genetic factors](#) at play, it is critical to find answers, especially if the aim is to continue to decrease the number of cancer deaths overall.

"We need to engage Black men in prostate [cancer](#) research and [prostate cancer clinical trials](#) if we're going to alleviate disparities. But more so, we need to focus on all increasing diversity in research for all cancers so we can address why some are still rising and why others are decreasing," she says.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

Citation: As cancer deaths decline, access to care remains a challenge in some US communities (2023, February 3) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-02-cancer-deaths-decline-access-communities.html>

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