

Guarantee Coverage of Clinical Trials Participation for Medicaid Patients

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) believes guaranteed access to clinical trials is an important part of high-quality cancer care and should be available to each cancer patient, regardless of his or her financial circumstances.

ASCO calls on policymakers to ensure high-quality cancer care for Medicaid enrollees by guaranteeing them coverage of routine patient care costs associated with clinical trials. Routine care includes items and services that a payer would cover for a patient not enrolled in a clinical trial, such as office visits, radiology exams, and laboratory tests.

Laws or agreements in close to forty states and DC require private insurers to cover the routine costs of clinical trials participation. Medicare has provided this coverage for beneficiaries' participation in trials since a 2000 Medicare National Coverage Determination. The Affordable Care Act requires insurers to cover routine patient care costs for trials participation. Medicaid was not specifically included in the requirement- perhaps as a matter of oversight, rather than intentional exclusion. Only 10 states and DC cover trials participation for Medicaid beneficiaries.

The state Medicaid programs that have written statutes, regulations, and/or policies that do require coverage are: Alaska, California, District of Columbia, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, North Carolina, Texas, Vermont and West Virginia. Others may have unwritten policies.

Inclusion of all types of patients in cancer trials is important to help us understand disparities in cancer outcomes. For example, African Americans are more than 2.5 times more likely to develop cancer. Even worse, male African Americans are 27% more likely to die and female African Americans are 11% more likely to die than Caucasians. Asians are more likely to develop and die from liver cancer than Caucasians. Enrollment in trials is low for all patient groups, and particularly so for many racial and ethnic minority patients who are over-represented in the Medicaid program. Guaranteeing Medicaid coverage when patients choose to participate in trials will help encourage participation of underrepresented groups and help us to understand and address these unacceptable disparities in cancer.

Coverage of the routine patient care costs associated with clinical trials is vital for cancer patients. For patients without acceptable treatment choices, enrollment in a clinical trial may offer hope for a response to a new anticancer therapy. Because cancer trials include the standard of care therapies, participation in a clinical trial can be an excellent treatment option.

Oncologists want their patients to consider enrolling in clinical trials, not only because of potential treatment benefits for the individual patient, but also because it is through these trials that general progress against cancer is achieved. Assuring coverage will help us make advancements against cancer.

ASCO strongly encourages policymakers to guarantee Medicaid enrollees coverage of routine patient care costs associated with clinical trials participation.