

Understanding The Costs of Cancer

If you are diagnosed with cancer, it is important to think about the different types of costs that could add up during your treatment and recovery periods. This will help you determine what kind of budgeting, support, or financial assistance you may need. **According to the American Cancer Society, an average 62% of cancer-related expenses are non-medical¹.** Your personal costs will depend on several factors, including the length and type of your cancer treatment plan and the extent of your health insurance coverage.

Some costs may be more obvious to you than others. For instance, many people quickly think about how much a particular medication will cost for them based on their insurance coverage. However, there are also other costs – often called “hidden costs” – you will need to consider. These are the costs of daily living that increase due to the illness and its treatment.

For instance, your expenses for gasoline and parking fees will go up a lot if you need to receive daily radiation therapy at a facility 20 miles away from your home. Or, a new expense is added to your budget if you need child care every Tuesday so you can go to the doctor’s office for chemotherapy. At the same time, **you (or a family member) may need to work less** – and earn less money – because of the demands of the treatment schedule.

To get started, it may be helpful to group the different types of costs based on your budget and needs. Common financial categories for cancer care include:

- **Doctor Appointments:** This includes payments for the medical care you receive at each doctor visit, such as a physical examination or check-up. In most situations, your insurance provider requires you to pay a fee called a co-payment, or co-pay, each time you visit the doctor. The amount of the co-pay is set by the insurance company, not the doctor or doctor’s office. In addition, there will typically be a separate payment needed for each laboratory test, such as a blood or urine test, done as part of your appointment.
- **Cancer Treatment Costs:** This includes payments for the medical care you receive during your cancer treatment, such as each radiation therapy session. If you’re participating in a clinical trial, there may be other cost-related factors to consider. Some aspects of your treatment may not be covered by insurance. In general, cancer treatment can take anywhere from a few days up to months or years, so you will need to map out, with the help of a doctor or nurse, how often and for how long you may have these out-of-pocket costs.

(Continued)

- **Medication Costs:** This includes payments for the specific medicines prescribed during your treatment period, such as chemotherapy and drugs to help relieve common side effects.
- **Family and Living Expenses:** This includes costs related to running your household and caring for your family during your cancer treatment, such as child care, elder care, and coping support.
- **Caregiving, At-home Care, and Long-Term Care:** This includes additional costs of the care that a person with cancer may need, such as fixing meals or driving the patient to each medical appointment. It could also include extended nursing care at a specialized facility.
- **Transportation Costs:** This includes expenses you may have due to traveling to and from the doctor's office and/or treatment facility, whether it is by car, bus, train, or airplane. This category may also cover the price of hotels or other lodging needed.
- **Employment, Legal, and Financial Issues:** This includes the costs that arise when a patient needs professional guidance on employment, legal, or financial issues related to their diagnosis. This includes such topics as addressing loss of wages of the patient or caregiver, learning about employment rights under the law, figuring out medical expenses during income tax filing, or writing a will.

Once you've outlined your cost categories, you can begin to think about the specific, individual costs in each one. If you feel overwhelmed, ask for help from a trusted family member, friend, or member of your health care team.

¹ *Cancer Facts & Figures*. American Cancer Society, 2007