

Cancer with Low-Income Socioeconomic Status

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Case Study Narrative

Anna is 23 years old, did **not finish college**, and has **two small children** (they are not, yet, school-age). She was recently diagnosed with **leukemia**. She really struggles **financially** (even with Medicaid) and **emotionally** with her diagnosis. She is **single** and her **parents are not nearby** (or otherwise able) to help.



Impact of Culture



Lifestyle Factors

- Smoking exposes people to benzene, one of the top carcinogens linked to leukemia.
- Chronic stress—like the kind Ana experiences as a single mom with limited resources—has been shown to weaken the immune system, making it harder to fight off cancerous cells.
- Healthy behaviors can reduce risk but it can be difficult for individuals to prioritize their well-being when they're focused on daily challenges like struggling paying bills, or getting to work

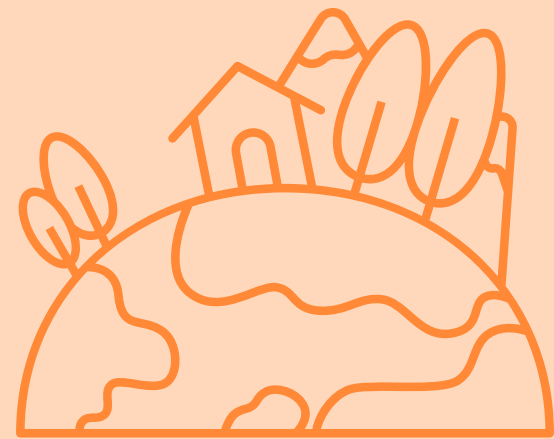


Socioeconomic Factors

- Low SES is linked not only to a higher risk of developing leukemia but also to poorer outcomes once diagnosed.
 - Financial hardship often means delayed diagnoses, limited treatment access, and higher stress.
- Patients from lower-income communities are more likely to miss or delay treatments, and survival rates are lower when treatment isn't started quickly or followed consistently.

Environmental factors

- Environmental exposures have been directly tied to leukemia risk.
- These exposures disproportionately affects low-SES communities as they live in areas closer to industrial zones or agriculture, where exposure to pesticides or solvents like benzene is more likely.
- Prior medical treatments, like radiation or certain chemotherapies, can raise risk for secondary leukemias.





Education

- Low education = lower health literacy
 - Making it harder to understand treatment plans, ask questions & recognize symptoms
- Almost 90% of adults in the U.S. struggle with health literacy.
 - Leads to worse decision-making around care, especially when combined with cultural beliefs or language barriers.



Geography

- Leukemia may be more common in some parts of the country, patients in rural or underserved regions often have worse prognoses.
- Cancer care centers are often located hours away in larger cities
- The distance can mean long travel times, missed work, and the challenge of finding childcare or reliable transportation.
- When care isn't close to home, getting early and aggressive treatment becomes much harder, which can have serious consequences.



Health

What is Leukemia?

Leukemia broadly defines a group of cancers that affect the blood and blood marrow, affecting either the myeloid or lymphocytic populations and resulting in the rapid proliferation of these cells.

4 Main Types:

- Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia
- Acute Myeloid Leukemia
- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia
- Chronic Myeloid Leukemia

Due to her age, it is most likely that Anna has Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia - which is the most common leukemia diagnosis in children and young adults. Most leukemia diagnoses, however, are from older adults.

Risk Factors?

- Genetics
- Age (Most prevalent in older adults)
- Smoking Behaviors
- Regular exposure to carcinogens
- Radiation exposure



Treatment Options

Leukemia is treated typically by a mixture of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, and stem-cell treatments

These treatments are typically **costly**, both financially and **time-wise**, with cycles every one to three weeks depending on treatment plan.

This can be difficult for patients attempting to maintain a career or find childcare if they have children.



Impact on Daily Life and Family

- Anna's young children are entirely dependent on her for **care** and emotional stability
 - No family nearby to assist with **childcare**
 - Increased risks of **neglect**, **isolation**, or **lack of stimulation** for her two young children (not yet in school)
- Children may face **trauma**, **anxiety**, or **emotional regression** due to disrupted routines and maternal illness
- Intense **fatigue** and **nausea** from leukemia treatment impair Anna's ability to cook, play, or provide structure in caring for her family
- Unpredictable **treatment schedules** make it difficult to maintain **household stability**
- **Transportation barriers** limit access to treatment and other services
 - 20% of leukemia patients travel 50+ miles for care
- Risk of **food insecurity** is high because access to fresh, healthy meals is often overlooked in support services.



Educational Disruption

- Anna did not complete college, limiting her **job opportunities** and understanding of healthcare (**health literacy**).
 - Lower education is linked to late diagnoses, reduced treatment adherence, and lower survival rates
 - Health literacy is essential to understanding complex cancer treatment plans
- Educational gaps hinder her ability to **advocate** for herself and her children in a complex healthcare system.
- Ongoing treatment, medical debt, and cognitive effects of chemotherapy (often called “chemo brain”) make **returning to school** or pursuing a **specialized career** increasingly difficult.



Emotional Impact

Emotionally, cancer takes a heavy toll. Anna is at high risk for **anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion**—especially with no support system nearby.

- High risk of **anxiety, depression, and isolation**

Being a single mother means she must care for her children while undergoing life-altering treatments, and that emotional strain extends to her kids too.

- Lack of nearby family support intensifies **emotional distress**
- Single motherhood **compounds emotional burden**, necessitating caring for kids while undergoing treatment
- **Children** may also suffer emotional effects and require support



Financial Burden

the financial toll is also significant with a diagnosis as severe as cancer, especially for individuals with low socioeconomic status.

- **Cancer care costs ~\$156,000/year**
- **Leukemia treatment costs about \$156,000 per year, with the highest costs hitting right after diagnosis. Even with Medicaid, coverage varies by state and doesn't always include the full range of care.**
- **Childcare, transportation, and housing add to the financial weight. And for single parents like Anna, income typically drops by 20% following diagnosis.**
- **Childcare alone can cost over \$15,000 a year for one child—making it nearly impossible to manage without significant outside support.”**



What Is Needed?

A diagnosis of Leukemia requires several resources addressing financial, emotional, and physical hardships that the patient might face

Medicaid-Eligible Resources

- Needed to help cover the costs of specialized oncology that might not be fully covered through regular Medicaid
- Many leukemia treatments require specialized visits
- Demand for trustworthy, consistent, and affordable childcare
- Access to nutritious, read-to-eat meals

Emotional Support

- There is an emotional burden that comes with battling leukemia
- Peer support groups, either online or in-person, can provide a sense of connection
- Counseling, mentoring, or social networks
- Essential for helping with the mental and physical strain of the diagnosis



What Is Needed?

Physical Support for Non-Medical Expenses

- Finding affordable and trustworthy childcare can be extremely difficult
- Resources and organizations are necessary for individuals undergoing treatment and seeking childcare
- Affordable transportation is needed for individuals who have to travel far to receive treatment or attend specialized visits

Healthy and Affordable Foods

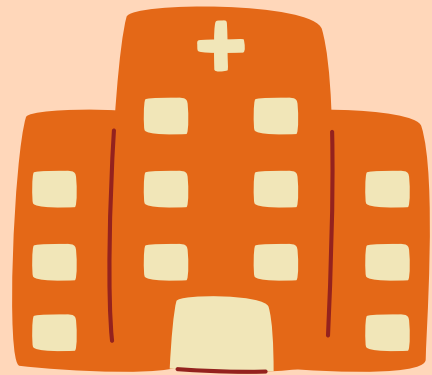
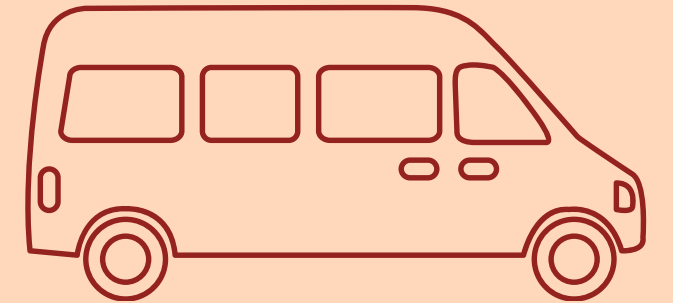
- Access to affordable and healthy foods can be essential for reducing stress of financial barriers
- Cancer support often lacks help towards access to healthy foods
- Stressors from insecurity about food and a lack of healthy food options can be harmful for individuals trying to recover from leukemia
- Resources that seek to help individuals get better access to healthy food is needed



Sustainable Solutions

Transportation

- **Athens has limited public transportation**, mainly surrounding downtown & UGA. Though the system is free, it's **limited in timeliness**.
- **Ability to walk** for transportation means **is limited** for cancer/leukemia patients.
- **A government funded rideshare program for healthcare treatment** would be optimal.
 - Less patient reliability on a single transportation form



Medicaid Expansion

- The state of Georgia has not expanded Medicaid.
 - **Limiting early diagnostic testing & emotional support**
- **Medicaid expansion** in Georgia would **broaden healthcare accessibility**
 - Including more preventative care, more specialists accepting Medicaid, increased chronic disease management, & less gaps in long-term coverage



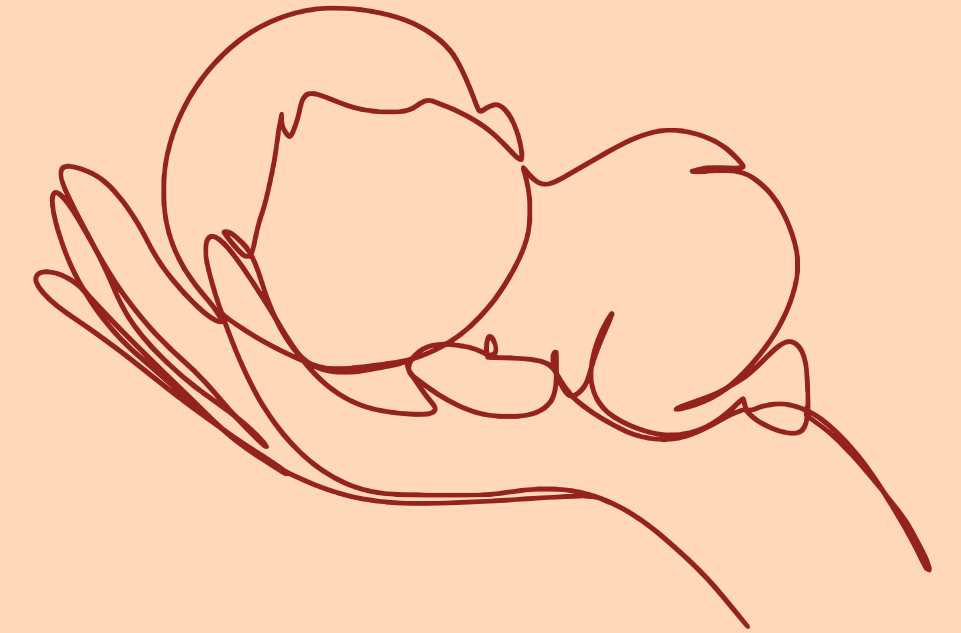
Universal Healthcare

- Universal healthcare has the capacity to address the growing chronic disease crisis, lessen costs, limit health disparities, & increase opportunities for preventative healthcare
- **Universal healthcare would reduce the financial & emotional strain.**
 - Insurance/Medicaid determines coverage & what providers are available

Sustainable Solutions

Universal/Income-Based Childcare

- Universal/IB childcare would **ensure accessible childcare to all families**, regardless of socioeconomic status.
 - Through universal provision or cost-scaling to income
- This **alleviates the stress of financial challenges & increases treatment accessibility**.
- This would strongly **serve single parents & low-income families** experiencing a medical crisis with ongoing treatment.
- Universal/IB childcare is **able to positively influence development & education among children from low-income families**.
 - Programs offer environments that support children's emotional, cognitive, & social growth



Health Education

- Health education is able to **address various health issues** (from chronic disease to mental health) & **extends into policy**
 - Lessens the impact of health disparities
- Widespread **health education initiatives would empower patients**
 - This allows them to make healthier choices, participate in healthier behaviors, & acknowledge necessary resources to do so



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