



NHMA

Improving Access to Improve Care

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Introduction

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Cancer has proven to be a major burden for the Hispanic community, which accounts for nearly 20% of America's population. In fact, the leading cause of death for Hispanic Americans is cancer; 1 in three Hispanics will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. Despite this burden, Hispanic Americans, when compared to non-Hispanic whites, are underdiagnosed for the most common cancers, despite being at a higher risk of certain cancer types.

Medical innovation brings today's cancer patients new hope for longer and better lives. Targeted cancer therapies have helped drive a record decline in cancer deaths in the United States in recent years. They've also ushered in the dynamic and disruptive age of precision medicine.

Biomarker testing provides the critical connection between targeted therapies and cancer patients. By locating specific genetic mutations or proteins, testing indicates whether a given patient will respond to a targeted medication. The information can be, quite literally, lifesaving.

Too often, however, biomarker testing instead becomes cancer patients' missing link. Insurance companies either withhold coverage for testing or shift an unmanageable portion of the cost onto the patient. As a result, only about one-third of cancer patients report receiving biomarker testing as part of their care.

These policies add an additional barrier for Hispanic Americans, exacerbating disparities in outcomes and delaying optimal treatment. Increased awareness and more robust coverage policies can stem the tide of missed opportunity caused by barriers to biomarker testing. And Hispanic Americans, aided by easier access to biomarker testing, can reap the benefits of targeted cancer treatments, reversing years of worrying outcomes disparities.

NHMA WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AMGEN FOR SUPPORTING THIS REPORT

Facts About Cancer in Latinos

1 Cancer is the leading cause of death among Hispanics/Latinos

Cancer accounts for **21%** of deaths among Latinos, whereas heart disease is the leading cause of death among non-Hispanic Whites. In 2021, there were an estimated **176,600** new cancer cases and **46,5000** cancer deaths among Hispanics.

2 Common types of cancer vary depending on gender assigned at birth...

for Hispanic cisgender women, the most common type of cancer is breast cancer. For Hispanic cis men, it's lung cancer.

3 Hispanic people are generally less likely to be diagnosed...

at an early stage of cancer, which would be when treatment is usually less intense and there are higher chances of recovery.

Patients that received targeted therapy for metastatic cancers had

2.0x+

increase in median progression-free survival and **1.5x** an increase in overall cancer survival, according to a cancer study from 2015.



4 Among all racial/ethnic groups combined, 45% of cancer deaths in the United States could be prevented....

with the adoption of healthier lifestyles. Specifically, about **1 in 5 cancer cases is attributed to smoking**. A similar amount is attributable to the combination of excess body weight, alcohol, unhealthy diet, and physical activity.

Cancer caused by infectious organisms is also preventable through vaccines, behavioral changes, and treating the infection.

Source: Cancer Facts and Figures for Hispanics/Latinos 2018–2020. American Cancer Society.

Source: Cancer Statistics for the US Hispanic/Latino Population, 2021. CA A cancer Journal for Clinicians, 2021

Quick Facts on Biomarker Care



Biomarkers are signals of abnormal physiological processes, medical conditions, or disease that are found in blood, tissue, and other bodily fluids. In order to determine if a patient will benefit from specific targeted therapies, doctors should test for specific biomarkers.

Biomarker Tests

- There are two types of biomarker tests: **single analyte tests** identify and measure one gene or molecule, while **multi-panel tests** do it to multiple genes or molecules, ranging from a few to several hundred.
- Multi-panel tests can yield information on multiple known biomarkers with associated **treatments**. Given that these tests examine hundreds of genes at a time, they typically also provide information on many biomarkers that are still considered experimental or investigational.
- Multi-panel tests offer immediate benefit to certain patients and allow for opportunities for **research** and future development of therapies that can target biomarkers.

Biomarker Impact on Care

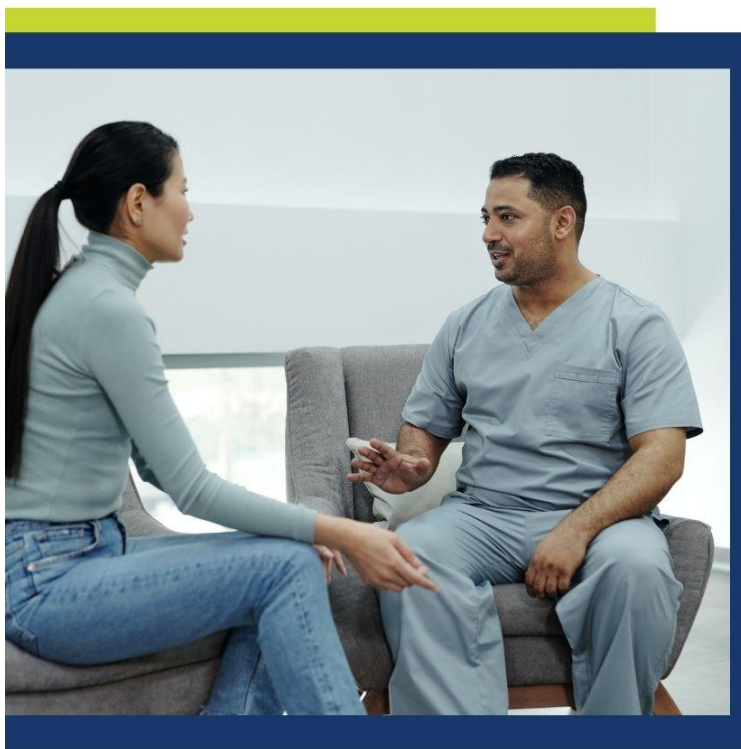
- Use of precision medicine, like biomarker testing, is necessary to improving cancer outcomes. Targeted therapies are a key to unlocking the future of precision medicine but these are not possible without proper access to biomarker testing.
- Research shows that there are improved overall survival and progression-free survival rates in cancer patients who receive targeted cancer therapy following biomarker testing.*

Key Points for Doctors

- Wide-spread coverage of biomarker testing would help doctors to diagnose and treat patients more effectively and have more standardization so that results are more accurate and comparable over time.
- Biomarker testing provides opportunities beyond just targeted therapies – by creating easier access to biomarker tests, patients can be eligible for clinical trials and more research can be done to find further therapies and innovations for treating cancer.

Key Points for Patients

- Research shows that there are improved overall survival and progression-free survival rates in cancer patients who receive targeted cancer therapy following biomarker testing. If access to biomarker testing is improved, more patients can benefit from these improved survival rates.*
- Precision medicine is the future of cancer care and having access to the newest innovations in care is ideal. Currently, without insurance coverage, biomarker testing is too expensive for the average cancer patient. Insurance should cover this form of care.



*Source: Impact of Precision Medicine in Diverse Cancers: A Meta-Analysis of Phase II Clinical Trials, 2015
Genomic Profiling of Advanced Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer in Community Settings: Gaps and Opportunities, 2017

Overview

The National Hispanic Medical Association partnered with Amgen to plan and implement three state-based webinars in New York, Illinois, and Texas to discuss the burden of cancer care, as well as disparities in diagnosis and treatment among Hispanic Americans, in addition to how policy impacts health equity. Each webinar served as a platform for clinicians, NHMA staff and/or stakeholders in cancer care to discuss the need for increased access to biomarker testing and treatment for the Hispanic community. The following report summarizes the project's activities.



"We have made so much progress in the treatment of cancer by understanding biomarker testing and selecting better treatments for patients that it is critical as primary care providers that we educate our patients that even if you have a diagnosis of cancer, it is important to meet an oncologist. It is important to get all the information that you can get, so you can get the best outcomes. We know that when we look at this whole story of Hispanics, the time that it takes for them to get diagnosed and when they get diagnosed with advanced disease, how many of them don't get any treatment."

Estelamari Rodriguez, MD, MPH

Associate Director of Community Outreach and Co-Lead of
the Thoracic Site Disease Group
Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami Miller School of
Medicine

"I see patients today that are not offered what I was offered 10 years ago, but I think importantly I have been on targeted treatment for all this time, and I have no doubt that is 100 percent the reason why I'm still alive. There's absolutely no way that someone can take chemotherapy for that long of a time. Patients don't want to just have more time; we need to want to live that time right. We need our lives to be good and our quality of life to be good to live that long"

Julia Maues

Biomarker Patient Advocate



"Biomarker testing is a big priority for us because as we heard from Dr. Rodriguez this is really about connecting patients with the most effective treatment for their cancer. This is really game changing as there are patients who maybe thought they might only have a few months to live or if they were receiving treatment a few years ago would only have a few months, who are thriving years later and just doing really well and living a really normal good quality of life."

Hilary Gee Geockner, MSW

Senior State and Local Campaign Manager
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)

"Somehow and some way we need to figure out a way to educate oncologists in these small cities or towns throughout the United States... the first thing they do is offer chemoradiation."

Juanita Segura

Biomarker Patient Advocate



"Only 2.2% patients that were Hispanic with stage four lung cancer were referred to palliative care from 2009-2019...we know early referral to palliative care assures all patients with lung cancer can live longer and better but we couldn't even reach 5% for Hispanic patients."

Narjust Florez, MD

Associate Director
Cancer Care Equity Program
Thoracic Medical Oncologist
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard Cancer Center
Faculty Member
Harvard Medical School



"What's really been key to our efforts in the states where legislation has passed is really education of lawmakers to help them understand the problem we are facing and the opportunity for biomarker testing to really lead to improve patient outcomes...Physicians and other medical professionals are key to really passing laws like we did in Illinois... the most impactful thing is having a respected physician telling and demonstrating and speaking about her experience how beneficial biomarker testing is...."

Devon Adams, RN, MPH

Senior Analyst for Policy and Legislative
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network



"There are new treatments that are available that need to be thought about in terms of teaching the next generation, to start understanding where to get new information. New information happens every day. We've got to figure out how to best educate our doctors on how to increase their efficient time in looking for new ways to treat their patients. In this case, biomarker testing"

Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, MACP

President and CEO
National Hispanic Medical Association

Biomarker Webinar Series:

New York Biomarker Testing Webinar: Improving Access to Improve Care

Panel Discussion: The National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) hosted the first webinar of the Biomarker series on July 14, 2022, featuring Dr. Estelamari Rodriguez, MD and Devon Adams, RN, MPH, as our speakers. Dr. Rodriguez is the Associate Director of Community Outreach and Co-Lead of the Thoracic Site Disease Group of the NCI-designated Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. Devon Adams is a registered nurse and Senior Analyst for Policy and Legislative support at the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). The focus of the first biomarkers webinar was to discuss the importance of biomarker testing and methods of increasing access to care, to ultimately improve cancer treatment within the Hispanic community. As previously noted, cancer is the leading cause of mortality among Hispanics, who are 26% more likely not to receive cancer treatment. However, during the webinar, it was emphasized how biomarker testing has driven the discovery of various drug therapies, such as for lung cancer in particular, which in turn assists in leading to an improved quality of life for those living with cancer. Additionally, our speakers also highlighted the barriers to biomarker testing within the Hispanic population, which include lack of access to health care due to inadequate insurance coverage. Lack of insurance coverage is a major barrier, as it can lead to a late diagnosis, and contribute to a higher chance of not receiving quality cancer treatment. The ACS CAN has worked to put together a disease agnostic model into legislation to require insurance plans, including Medicaid, to cover biomarker testing for the purpose of diagnosis, treatment, management or monitoring, when tests are supported by medical or scientific evidence, which would greatly increase cancer treatment outcomes.

Illinois Biomarker Testing Webinar: Improving Access to Improve Care

Panel Discussion: The National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) hosted the second webinar for the Biomarker series on July 21, 2022. Our first speaker was Dr. Narjust Florez, MD., followed by Devon Adams, RN, MPH. Dr. Florez is the Associate Director of the Cancer Care Equity Program, a thoracic medical oncologist at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard Cancer Center as well as a faculty member at Harvard Medical School. Devon Adams is a registered nurse and Senior Analyst for Policy and Legislative support at the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN).

The focus of the webinar was to discuss the importance of biomarker testing and improving access to cancer care in the Hispanic community, in addition to the importance of diversifying research and including more Hispanics in clinical trials. During the webinar, Dr. Florez discussed the varying racial composition of the Hispanic community, emphasizing that although Hispanics are classified as one ethnicity within clinical trials, the Hispanic community is vastly diverse. It was also highlighted that having representation within the biomarker clinical trials is pivotal for inclusion and success for patient survival rate and medical attention across communities. On the legislative side of Biomarker testing, ACS CAN announced that Illinois was the first state to pass their disease diagnosis legislation model bill, allowing insurance plans, including Medicaid, to cover biomarker testing throughout different stages when the tests are supported by medical or scientific evidence. Lastly, Juanita Segura, a lung cancer advocate and former cancer patient joined us for our roundtable discussion to speak on her experience as a patient who has benefited from biomarker testing. During the roundtable discussion, Juanita emphasized how difficult it was to receive treatment for biomarker testing, which ultimately led her to become an advocate, underlining the importance accessible biomarker testing can have on individuals with cancer.

Texas Biomarker Testing Webinar: Improving Access to Improve Care

Panel Discussion: The National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) hosted the third and final webinar for the Biomarker series on August 25, 2022. Our panel included Dr. Estelamari Rodriguez, MD followed by Hilary Gee Geockner, MSW and patient, Julia Maues. Dr. Rodriguez is the Associate Director of Community Outreach and Co-Lead of the Thoracic Site Disease Group of the NCI-designated Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. Hilary Gee Geockner is the Senior State and Local Campaign Manager from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN).

Dr. Rodriguez highlighted the importance of biomarker testing and its effectiveness and benefits when treating cancer patients. Patients are more likely to live long, fulfilling lives with the help of precision medicine. However, Dr. Rodriguez added that biomarker testing is not readily available to everyone, especially for cancer patients in the Hispanic community. One of the barriers that affects the Hispanic community the most is the lack of patient education and awareness, given that a major part of patient education is for the providers to educate their patients of all the possible treatments available to them.

Hilary Gee Geockner emphasized the legislative efforts to make comprehensive biomarker testing available to everyone, especially in Texas. ACS CAN aims to introduce a legislative bill in Texas by next year that advocates biomarker testing to be covered through the purpose of diagnosis, treatment and appropriate management through private insurance, but more importantly by state Medicaid. Julia Mauer, our patient advocate, agreed with Dr. Rodriguez, and expressed that biomarkers should be offered to every patient who could benefit from it, rather than the patient having to inquire about it. To close, Julia expressed that biomarker testing has enabled her to live a healthy and fulfilling life as a breast cancer survivor.

Factors that Influence Health



Given longstanding disparities, Hispanic individuals are especially vulnerable to cancer inequalities because of disproportionate poverty, higher percentage uninsured, and other barriers to optimal health. In 2016, approximately **19%** of all Hispanics lived in poverty, compared to **9%** of white people.

Survival

- Cancer survival is described by five-year relative survival, which is how many people have survived their cancer 5 years after diagnosis, adjusted for normal life expectancy.
- The five-year relative survival of Hispanics is lower than that of non-Hispanic Whites for most types of cancer. This disparity likely reflects later stage diagnosis, a higher portion of thick tumors in Hispanics, as well as lack of follow-ups of patient vital status that are often less accurate for people of color
- Research shows that there are improved overall survival and progression-free survival rates in cancer patients who receive targeted therapy following biomarker testing.



Trends in Cancer Mortality

- Cancer death rates in the US began declining generally in 1991, but didn't decline for Hispanics until the late 1990's.
- In the 2010's, cancer death declined for Hispanic men and women more slowly than for non-Hispanic white people (**1.6% v. 1.8%** for men, and **0.9% v. 1.5%** for women).

Cancer Occurrence

- **1 in 3** Hispanics will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime; of these, **1 in 5 Hispanic males** and **1 in 6 females** will die from it, compared to **1 in 2** of whites being diagnosed and **1 in 5** dying from it.
- In 2021, there were approximately **80,200** new cancer cases among Hispanic men and **96,400** cases in Hispanic women.

Access to Healthcare

- In 2018, **26%** of Hispanic adults under 65 years old were uninsured, compared to **9%** of non-Hispanic white people.
- Hispanics are less likely to have a usual source of care as well. (**25% v. 15%**).
- Although higher quality healthcare and public health infrastructure may be available in the US, many immigrants face barriers like having less paid time off, lower access to employer-provided health insurance and transportation, impacting overall access.

Source: Cancer Facts and Figures for Hispanics/Latinos 2018–2020. American Cancer Society.
Source: Cancer Statistics for the US Hispanic/Latino Population, 2021. CA A cancer Journal for Clinicians, 2021

Summary

Overall, by raising awareness through educational materials and the three-state based webinar series, the National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) was successfully able to underline that the disparities of biomarker testing are multifactorial, and that comprehensive biomarker testing is essential for health equity in cancer care.

With regard to the disparities in biomarker testing, existing barriers such as limited clinical trial representation, social determinants of health, inadequate insurance coverage, and lack of access to cancer screening play a critical role in the disproportionate knowledge and rates of biomarker testing among the Hispanic population.

Ultimately, research shows better survival and progression-free survival rates in cancer patients who receive targeted cancer therapy with biomarker testing, which allows patients to live long and fulfilling lives. Given the barriers that the Hispanic community faces, there is a need to broaden access to healthcare by expanding public and private insurance plans to cover biomarker testing. Additionally, there is a need to equip institutions and providers with resources and adequate training for biomarker testing, in order to increase access to better cancer care for our patients. To view our educational materials or learn more about our webinar series, please visit

<https://www.nhmamd.org/biomarker-cancer-projects> for additional information.