

# How did the early COVID-19 pandemic affect cancer survivors?

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Recent research indicates that during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of working-aged U.S. adults without health insurance did not change despite increases in unemployment, and the

prevalence of unhealthy behaviors decreased. The findings, which were published in *CANCER*, pertained to individuals with and without a history of cancer.

Cancer survivors often have high health care needs and may be vulnerable to the effects of economic and health care disruptions, such as those that occurred during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. To investigate, Xuesong Han, Ph.D., of the American Cancer Society, and her colleagues used data from the nationwide, population-based Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System—an annual household telephone survey—to examine changes in multiple health-related measures in 2020 among cancer survivors, comparing them with adults without a history of cancer. Specifically, they assessed [health insurance coverage](#), access to care, employment, health behaviors, and self-reported health.

Among adults aged 18–64 years, the uninsured rate did not change significantly in 2020 despite increases in unemployment. The prevalence of unhealthy behaviors, such as insufficient sleep and smoking, decreased in 2020, and self-rated health improved, regardless of cancer history. Declines in smoking were greater among [cancer survivors](#) than among adults without a cancer history.

"Our findings suggest that the pandemic may have motivated people to adopt certain healthier behaviors, and national and regional policy responses to the pandemic regarding insurance coverage, [unemployment benefits](#), and [financial assistance](#) may have contributed to the observed positive changes," said Dr. Han. "As policies related to the public health emergency expire, ongoing monitoring of longer-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer survivorship is warranted."

**More information:** Xuesong Han et al, The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and health among cancer survivors in the United

States, *CANCER* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.34386](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.34386)).

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