

# New report highlights barriers to health equity for patients living with cancer and/or blood disorders and calls for action

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London, 16<sup>th</sup> December – [A new report by the Patients Association](#), funded by Bristol Myers Squibb, sheds light on the stark health inequities faced by patients living with cancer and/or blood disorders, revealing significant disparities driven by social determinants of health, systemic barriers, and discrimination. The report also offers recommendations to improve access to equitable healthcare.

The report identifies critical issues such as economic and social factors, mistrust in healthcare services, systemic racism, and lack of joined-up care, all of which exacerbate health inequalities for underserved communities.

The report calls for a patient-centred approach that prioritises shared decision-making to ensure cancer and/or blood disorder patients are treated as equal partners in their care. It also calls for a multi-agency approach to tackle health disparities, aligning national and local strategies, such as NHS England's Core20PLUS5 framework, to enhance access to early cancer diagnosis.

The report finds that cancer and/or blood disorder patients from underserved communities consistently experience worse health outcomes and lower standards of care. Contributing factors include delays in diagnosis, lower uptake of screening programmes, and mistrust of healthcare systems. Barriers such as low health literacy, cultural insensitivity from staff, and systemic discrimination further hinder equitable access to care.

Patients interviewed for this report highlighted several critical issues, including difficulty navigating healthcare systems and insufficient communication about their rights and available benefits. Many patients reported transportation and medication costs causing financial difficulties.

Organisations working with underserved communities reinforced these findings, emphasising the pervasive mistrust in the health among marginalised communities. This mistrust often results from discrimination, such as delayed diagnoses and unequal access to treatment. LGBTQ+ patients and those with sickle cell disease described particularly hostile or dismissive interactions with healthcare providers.

The report also draws attention to the role of social determinants of health, such as inadequate housing, poverty, and living in a deprived neighbourhood. These factors are closely linked to higher rates of cancer and mortality, as well as reduced access to essential healthcare resources.

Tackling these challenges requires urgent action at both a national and local level. The Patients Association calls on policymakers, healthcare professionals, and community organisations to work together to ensure equitable access to care for all.

Reflecting on the report, Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patients Association said:

"Equitable healthcare is an urgent necessity. It is deeply concerning that barriers such as systemic discrimination, financial hardship, and mistrust of the health and care system persist, disproportionately affecting underserved communities. Only by addressing these disparities can we achieve a health and care system that provides equality and dignity for all. We call on the government and the health and care system to align national and local strategies, address the social determinants of health, and foster trust between patients and healthcare providers. We must work together to close these gaps and build a system rooted in fairness, trust, and accessibility."

For more information, please contact [media@patients-association.org.uk](mailto:media@patients-association.org.uk)

## Notes for editors

The Patients Association's purpose is to ensure that everybody can access the health and care they need to live well, by ensuring that services are designed and delivered through equal partnership with patients. It is an independent charity.

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