

Improving the Health and Wellness of Cancer Survivors in Nevada Rural Communities



The Nevada Cancer Coalition (NCC) participated in a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pilot project to improve medical care and coordination for cancer survivors living in rural areas. Nevada is home to approximately 140,000 cancer survivors. Nevada's rural and frontier counties show increased cancer incidence and mortality rates, with late-stage diagnosis being a serious problem for breast, colorectal, and lung cancers¹.

Patient navigation (PN) and telementoring (through Project ECHO*) are promising approaches to improve cancer survivor care in rural areas. PN aims to remove barriers to care across the health care continuum and can better connect specialists (e.g., oncologist, social workers) with primary care providers (PCPs) for smooth patient care transition. Simultaneously, Project ECHO uses case-based communities of practice to increase workforce capacity and enhance the knowledge base and skillsets of rural PCPs.



NCC's Pilot Project Strategies

Project ECHO

NCC collaborated with the University of Nevada-Reno ECHO Hub to:

- Increase capacity of rural PCPs and community health workers to care for and support cancer survivors.
- Understand the late and long-term survivorship needs.

Patient Navigation

NCC leveraged their ThriveNV program to:

- Improve the quality of life for rural cancer survivors by increasing access to PN services, support services, and resources.
- Increase the state's community-clinical navigation capacity through partnership development and creation of a Navigation Network.

About CDC's Pilot Program to Address Rural Disparities in Cancer Survivorship

CDC's National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program selected four awardees to conduct a pilot project *Improving the Health and Wellness of Cancer Survivors in Rural Communities* to bridge the health inequity gap experienced by rural cancer survivors.²⁻⁴ The pilot, designed to increase the quality of cancer survivorship care in rural communities, used Project ECHO's platform to increase the knowledge and skills of multi-disciplinary PCP teams and PN to increase communication between health care specialists and PCPs.

Project Achievements

Project ECHO

6 ECHO sessions delivered.

18 ECHO participants.

95% Of ECHO session participants reported enhanced knowledge.

88% Of ECHO session participants reported intent to apply learnings.

Patient Navigation

81 Patients referred and enrolled.

34 Patients navigated.

79 Client barriers resolved, including financial, support resource needs, and care coordination.

107 Resource referrals made to community resources, including support groups, financial assistance services, or a social worker.

Takeaways and Lessons Learned

- Project ECHO series strengthened relationships with Project ECHO Nevada, University of Nevada-Las Vegas physicians, and other partners.
- Creating the Navigation Network connected navigators and assisted more people beyond NCC PN's reach alone.
- Community-based PN program allows for navigation of more than cancer survivors, such as caregivers.
- PN-specific software is important for tracking encounters, barriers, time spent on navigation encounters, and referrals.
- Identify existing programs and resources to avoid duplicating efforts.
- Clarifying the role PCPs play in cancer survivorship is essential to obtain their buy-in.

¹2016–2020 Nevada State Cancer Plan.

²Freeman, H. P., & Rodriguez, R. L. (2011). History and principles of patient navigation. *Cancer*, 117(15 Suppl.), 3539–3542.

³Alverson, D. C. (2017). An introduction to project ECHO. *Rural Health Quarterly*. Retrieved July 23, 2019, from <http://ruralhealthquarterly.com/home/2017/07/28/an-introduction-to-project-echo/>

⁴Bhavaraju, N., Nanni, J. E., Carlson, C., Sholk, J., Peterson, K., Smith, L. A. (2016). Breaking the barriers to specialty care: Practical ideas to improve health equity and reduce cost. Retrieved July 23, 2019, from fsg.org/publications/breaking-barriers-specialty-care

*Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes.