

Dana-Farber Leads IGNITE Initiative to End Health Inequities in Pediatric Cancer Care

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In a bold step toward addressing the stark disparities in pediatric cancer care, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute is taking the lead in launching [IGNITE](#)—the first national, pediatric hematology-oncology health equity research consortium. This groundbreaking initiative aims to eradicate inequities for children, adolescents, and young adults diagnosed with cancer or blood disorders via the rapid development and evaluation of policy-relevant, evidence-based and community informed health equity interventions.

Recent data have highlighted an alarming reality: children from low-income households are more likely to experience cancer relapse and face lower survival rates compared to their more privileged peers, despite receiving treatment on highly standardized clinical trials at top academic centers. These inequities, rooted in social drivers of health such as food insecurity, housing instability, and lack of transportation, disproportionately affect families in poverty and those from historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities, and contribute to significant disparities in cancer outcomes.

“We now know that one in three children diagnosed with cancer lives in a low-income household, and one in three families is concerned about meeting basic needs like food and transportation while their child is receiving chemotherapy,” said [Kira Bona, MD, MPH](#), a pediatric oncologist at [Dana-Farber/Boston Children’s Cancer and Blood Disorder Center](#) and founding member of the IGNITE Consortium. “These children are more likely to relapse and die from their disease. Through IGNITE, we’re building the infrastructure necessary to address these inequities and change the landscape of pediatric cancer care for the better.”

The IGNITE Consortium—comprising pediatric oncology experts from 12 leading institutions across the United States, with Dana-Farber being the lead site—was born out of the urgent need for a research infrastructure dedicated to eradicating disparities in pediatric cancer outcomes.

In addition to Dana-Farber, the other consortium members are: Dissemination & Implementation

Science Center UC San Diego; Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Cancer and Blood Disease Institute, Children's Hospital Los Angeles; Seattle Children's Hospital; University of Alabama at Birmingham; Cincinnati Children's Hospital; Children's Hospital Colorado; Yale School of Medicine; Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford; UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals; University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center; Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. While clinical trials have historically focused on improving survival rates through drug efficacy, IGNITE's focus will be on scaling and testing health equity interventions that target the social drivers of health.

"Our consortium fills a critical gap in pediatric oncology by creating a framework that can rapidly develop, test, and evaluate health equity interventions. This is analogous to early-phase drug trials, but instead of testing new drugs, we're addressing the root causes of disparities like poverty and access to care by testing supportive care interventions that directly target exposures like poverty," said Bona.

The consortium held its inaugural meeting this past spring, bringing together experts, families, and advocates to collaborate on the next steps for IGNITE. This fall, the consortium will launch its first two collaborative research protocols. The first study will focus on socio-demographic data collection, aiming to understand the unmet social needs of children with newly diagnosed or relapsed cancer. The second study will test a new supportive care intervention tailored for low-income families, with the goal of improving relapse, survival, and psychosocial outcomes.

"IGNITE seeks to at last eradicate the disparities that finances and language access represent to pediatric and young adult patients," said Monica Vinasco-Sandford, a member of IGNITE's Parent/Guardian Advisory Board. "As a language access provider and a bereaved mother, I am proud to be part of this consortium that is dedicated to ensuring every child has an equal chance at life."

This consortium is a critical response to the inequities that have persisted in pediatric cancer care for too long. As Dana-Farber and its IGNITE partners prepare to launch their first health equity intervention study, they remain committed to their vision: to eradicate inequities for children, adolescents, and young adults with cancer and blood disorders by ensuring equitable access to the best possible care and outcomes.

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