

# Oncology and Care Pathways

**Oncology care pathways are treatment guidelines designed to help clinicians deliver cancer care that is cost-effective and based on evidence.** Typically developed by health systems and insurers, and endorsed by national cancer organizations, these pathways offer a structured approach to treating specific cancer types at varying stages.



## Impact on Patient Care

For some patients, following a pathway can simplify complex decisions and offer a clear treatment plan during a difficult time. In these cases, pathways can serve as helpful tools that align clinicians, patients and payers around effective care strategies.

They are not, however, one-size-fits-all solutions.

**In reality, oncology care is rapidly evolving, and every patient is unique.**

Deviating from a pathway is sometimes necessary—especially when other treatments or individual factors suggest an alternative approach.

## Challenges to Consider

At times, pathways may not work best for an individual patient. While well-intended, care pathways can limit flexibility and access to novel treatments. These roadblocks can have serious consequences for a disease where time is critical.



**Delayed Access to Care:** When pathways require patients to try certain treatments before accessing others, they may delay or block access to more suitable options.



**One-Size-Fits-All Approach:** Oncology care is highly personalized, and rigid adherence to a pathway may ignore individual needs and tailored treatment.



**Innovation Gaps:** Cancer research is rapidly evolving. Pathways may lag behind the latest science, potentially leaving patients without timely access to new treatments.



**Administrative Burdens:** Clinicians and their patients often deal with challenges when they try to deviate from the care pathway guidelines.



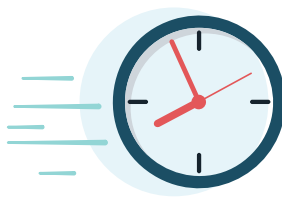
## What Patients Need

Oncology care pathways should enhance, not hinder, the patient-clinician relationship. That means:



### Ensuring flexibility

so clinicians can tailor care to the patient's unique needs



### Reducing unnecessary delays

caused by rigid protocols or restrictions



### Designing pathways

that evolve with innovation and put patient need at the center

## Conclusion

**When used appropriately, pathways can be a powerful tool in delivering consistent, high-quality cancer care.** But they must remain that—a tool. When oncology care pathways become barriers instead of guides, it's time to rethink how to balance evidence-based care with individualized treatment.



**Alliance for  
Patient Access**

The Alliance for Patient Access is a national network of policy-minded health care providers advocating for patient-centered care.

**[AllianceforPatientAccess.org](https://AllianceforPatientAccess.org)**

