



A young mother struggling for the last two years to get follow-up care for her son following his cancer diagnosis since the provider left their community during the pandemic and she does not have the ability to travel to a different cancer center an hour away. A woman in charity care experiencing visible signs that her cancer has returned but unable to get an appointment sooner than 10 weeks putting her life at risk even further. A Spanish speaking family, concerned about their daughter's illness, who did not realize she was being treated for cancer because the provider did not have translation services. These are not isolated stories; these are individuals and families that we have helped who represent a cancer experience that is often overlooked.

At Crossroads4Hope, **we serve everyone who is impacted by cancer** – the diagnosed, caregivers and loved ones, no matter who they are or where they live. However, more and more people are turning to us whose experiences reflect the widening "care gap" in the United States healthcare system. This World Cancer Day, I, along with the team at Crossroads4Hope, are calling for **urgent action and support** to mobilize behind **World Cancer Day's call to action to "Close Gaps in Care"**.

We are witnessing firsthand the devastating impact of the gaps in care. And after more than two decades in operation, now more than ever, we see that people are not just falling through the cracks, they are flooding them.

As CEO of Crossroads4Hope, A Network of Cancer Support, I lead a **dedicated team focusing on people, not the disease**. We don't wait for people to find us or to travel to our office, we go out into the community, leveraging technology to scale our efforts so we can reach as many people as possible, as early as possible, especially those at risk for being diagnosed with cancer. We can provide proactive interventions that increase a person's ability to access timely screenings and care. More importantly, improve a person's mental and physical wellbeing, transferring knowledge and activating skills through our person-centered model that transcends the experience.

While there have been significant advancements in cancer prevention and treatment options, many, especially in vulnerable and under-resourced communities **cannot connect to the care they deserve due to financial reasons, lack of insurance, transportation, cultural or systemic barriers.** More than 76 years ago, the World Health Organization defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Criticism of this definition still persists and in today's healthcare landscape and it is abundantly clear that the impact of this has not been our priority in the United States.

Consider the following:

Life expectancy is declining, mental health issues are soaring, and cancer prevalence and chronic disease rates are rising, particularly among young adults. Cancer patients face financial toxicity and are twice as likely to file for bankruptcy. This is the reality that requires an urgent need for a shift in mindset – from focusing on disease treatment to embracing a holistic approach that addresses the whole person, their family, and their community because patients and families cannot wait for the system to change, and neither is Crossroads4Hope.

Our motivation comes from our experience seeing what is possible when the professions of social work, public health, and child life operate at the top of license from outside a medical model as part of an interdisciplinary team approach. Working together and with other professionals like registered oncology dietitians, we can create a safety net of support alongside other like-minded community-based non-profit organizations in vulnerable and under resourced communities.

Threading through all our efforts is our 24/7 direct to mobile **MyGo2Support program**, which puts high quality psychosocial support and resources directly into the hands of people when and where they need it most.

We are using global models of public health to amplify our efforts to increase access to psychosocial support resources through:

- **Early Intervention:** We reach individuals before diagnosis, in communities where we are helping to normalize conversations about cancer, addressing disparities, and increasing access to screenings and care.
- **Activating Community Health Champions:** We are training community members as "first responders," who are able to connect individuals to timely and vital resources and support.

- **Educational Workshops:** We deliver workshops and conferences, equipping professionals, educators, and lay people with information to understand cancer, the cancer experience and the unique needs of those impacted by cancer.
- **Collaborations:** We partner with other non-profits and healthcare providers to seamlessly integrate our support services within clinical workflows, including through our MyGo2Support 24/7 direct to mobile digital program bridging the care gap early on.

These initiatives are making a difference. We see it in the eyes of a newly diagnosed patient finding strength in a support group, the determined steps of a survivor reclaiming their life, and the unwavering dedication of our volunteers. But the challenges are immense.

This World Cancer Day, I urge you to:

Donate to organizations like Crossroads4Hope that empower communities and bridge the care gap.

Become a **Health Champion** in your own community, spreading awareness and offering support.

Advocate for policies that prioritize equitable access to healthcare and address social determinants of health.

Hope is powerful, but action is essential.

Let's take on the cancer journey together with all those who are impacted, to help close the care gap and ensure that everyone, regardless of who they are or where they live has access to the support and resources they deserve, that can help save lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy J. Sutton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Amy J. Sutton
CEO, Crossroads4Hope