



## A Critical Need: Georgia Tax Credits for Patient Lodging

Every day, thousands of very sick Georgians battle cancer and other life-threatening medical conditions. In addition to the physical and emotional toll, many patients and their families struggle with the cost and logistics of a commute to potentially life-saving treatment that is only available at major medical centers far from home.

Deficiencies in Georgia's healthcare infrastructure only compound the challenge. A staggering 142 of Georgia's 159 counties have been designated as

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), meaning many Georgians must routinely travel hours for everything-- from basic care to specialized treatment. When the reality of a typical cancer regimen comes into focus, the financial and logistical barriers of two to eight weeks of chemo, radiation, and possibly surgery become colossal.

With 75% of Georgia's counties classified as rural, this dilemma is not theoretical—it's a harsh reality that can mean the difference between survival and preventable death.

## The Devastating Economics of Cancer Treatment Distance

The numbers tell a sobering story.

Let's say yours is a typical family in Oglethorpe County, where 15,000 citizens share just two primary care offices and no hospital. A cancer diagnosis for a family member could mean not only the emotional devastation of the disease, but also the difficult choice between a frequent commute to Atlanta or Augusta, or the practical nightmare of finding safe, affordable lodging near treatment centers, where premium rates are often \$150-300 per night – if such accommodations are available.

Lodging and meal costs alone for cancer care commuters in a case like this can reach \$14,000—a

crushing burden that forces families to choose between their financial stability and their lives. In Georgia, where rural hospital closures have accelerated (ranking third nationally behind only Tennessee and Texas), patients increasingly must travel to major medical centers for specialized oncology care.

For many rural Georgia families already struggling with poverty rates higher than their urban counterparts, these costs present an impossible barrier. The result is delayed treatment, shortened treatment courses, or complete abandonment of care—outcomes directly contributing to Georgia's higher cancer mortality rates compared to urban areas.

## Existing Resources: Overwhelmed and Insufficient

Georgia currently has limited resources for cancer patient lodging. The American Cancer Society's

Hope Lodge in Atlanta, renovated in 2021, provides 57 guest rooms and serves as a beacon of hope for

patients and caregivers. This remarkable facility saves families approximately \$3 million annually in hotel expenses and **has** provided 29,500 free nights to over 800 patients and caregivers in recent years. However, with accommodations limited and demand constantly exceeding capacity, Hope Lodge represents just a fraction of what's needed.

The waitlist for Hope Lodge tells the real story—many families are turned away or forced to seek expensive alternatives while undergoing the most challenging experience of their lives. Additional charitable organizations like Joe's House and various faith-based lodging programs exist, but operate with severely limited capacity and funding, unable to meet the growing demand from Georgia's rural communities.

## The Transformative Power of Tax Credit Incentives

Georgia has already demonstrated the remarkable effectiveness of tax credits in addressing critical social needs. The Fostering Success Act, which provides dollar-for-dollar tax credits for donations supporting aging-out foster youth, has generated millions in support and transformed countless lives. Similarly, adoption tax credits provide \$6,000 annually for five years to families adopting foster children, creating powerful incentives that increase adoptions and improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

A cancer patient lodging tax credit would operate on the same proven model by allowing Georgia taxpayers to redirect their state tax dollars to qualified charitable organizations providing lodging

assistance for cancer patients. **The** state could dramatically expand available resources without additional government expenditure. This approach leverages private compassion and civic responsibility while addressing a critical healthcare access barrier.



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## A Model That Works: Addressing Multiple Treatment Scenarios

Cancer patient lodging needs vary dramatically based on treatment type, but all create significant financial hardship. **Chemotherapy patients often need overnight accommodation after each session to recover safely before traveling home. Radiation therapy typically requires daily treatments for six to eight weeks, making temporary relocation essential.** Surgical patients often need extended recovery periods near their treatment facility before it's safe to travel.

A robust tax credit program would support various lodging models:

**Emergency Overnight Support:** For patients receiving chemotherapy or surgical procedures requiring post-treatment observation, simple

overnight accommodations near treatment centers can prevent dangerous travel while patients are experiencing treatment side effects.

**Extended Stay Programs:** Patients undergoing daily radiation for weeks or months need affordable, home-like accommodations with basic amenities like kitchenettes to prepare simple meals and laundry facilities for extended stays.

**Family Support Housing:** Accommodations that allow caregivers to stay with patients **are especially important for children and senior adults. It's important to recognize** that cancer treatment often requires family support systems that are crucial for both medical and emotional recovery.

**Transportation Integration:** Lodging programs that coordinate with local transportation services or provide shuttle services to treatment centers can

help to address the compounded challenge of both housing and daily travel to appointments.

## Economic and Social Returns on Investment

The financial logic of cancer patient lodging support is clear and compelling. When patients can access timely, consistent treatment close to specialized facilities, outcomes improve dramatically. Early intervention and completed treatment protocols significantly reduce long-term healthcare costs, prevent emergency interventions, and increase survival rates. The economic benefit extends beyond healthcare—families that don't face financial ruin from lodging costs remain productive community members, continue contributing to local economies, and avoid the cascading effects of medical bankruptcy.

Furthermore, robust lodging support attracts and retains specialized medical professionals in Georgia's major medical centers. When oncologists know their rural patients can access affordable accommodations, they're more likely to accept complex cases and provide comprehensive care. This reputation enhancement strengthens Georgia's position as a regional healthcare destination, bringing economic benefits that extend far beyond individual patient care.

## A Moral Imperative and Practical Solution

Cancer does not discriminate based on geography, but access to life-saving treatment currently does. Rural Georgians face cancer diagnosis with the same courage and determination as their urban counterparts, but they confront additional barriers that should not exist in a modern healthcare system. A tax credit for cancer patient lodging charities represents both moral imperative and practical solution—leveraging Georgia's proven tax credit model to address a critical healthcare access barrier.

charities, Georgia can ensure that ZIP code doesn't determine survival, that rural families don't face impossible choices between treatment and financial stability, and that every Georgian has access to the best possible cancer care regardless of where they call home.

The question isn't whether Georgia can afford to create this tax credit—it's whether Georgia can afford not to. Every day of delay means rural families facing cancer without adequate support, treatment decisions based on lodging costs rather than medical necessity, and preventable deaths in communities that form the heart of our state. The time for action is now, and the solution is within our reach.

The success of similar programs demonstrates that Georgians, when given the opportunity, will generously support their neighbors facing life's greatest challenges. By creating a tax credit for donations to qualified cancer patient lodging