For World Cancer Day, U.S. Advocates Focus on Three Key Policies

Alliance for Cancer Care Equity Advocates (ACCE) aim to “close the care gap” via clinical trials, cancer screenings and patient navigation services. Plus: A congressional resolution for World Cancer Day, February 4.

February 1, 2024 By National Comprehensive Cancer Network, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and National Minority Quality Forum

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For World Cancer Day, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) and the National Minority Quality Forum (NMQF) are announcing three key areas of policy focus as part of the Alliance for Cancer Care Equity (ACCE) joint collaboration, including advancing diversity in clinical trials, improving cancer screening and early detection, and increasing access to patient navigation. The organizations are also working with Congresswoman Terri Sewell (D-AL) to observe the day with a congressional resolution.

According to the resolution, the United States Congress designates February 4 as World Cancer Day to highlight the importance of taking meaningful action to raise awareness of the disparities that exist in cancer care, and support efforts to close the care gap. Despite progress in recent years, Black Americans have the highest death rate and lowest survival rate of any racial or ethnic group for most cancers. Compared to White people, mortality rates are two-fold higher for prostate, stomach and uterine corpus cancers in Black people and for liver, stomach and kidney cancers in Native American people.

World Cancer Day is a global awareness day organized by the Union of International Cancer Control (UICC) every February 4. The 2024 observance marks the third and final year for the “Close the Care Gap” campaign focused on reducing disparities in cancer treatment and outcomes.

The ACCE will continue to identify governmental actions to drive further improvements in the three areas of focus and advance necessary structural changes to cancer care delivery throughout the U.S. They call on members of Congress to support:

- H.R.1826/S.2821 - PSA Screening for HIM Act
- H.R.4286 - Increasing Access to Lung Cancer Screening Act

- H.R.4363/S.2213 - Comprehensive Cancer Survivorship Act

“We must ensure that every person with cancer—regardless of race/ethnicity, geographic location or other societal factors—has equal access to life-saving early detection, treatment and support,” said Crystal S. Denlinger, MD, Chief Executive Officer, NCCN. “Improving diversity in clinical trials is fundamental to advance cancer care. It will help us fill knowledge gaps—such as how effective various innovations are for people with different backgrounds—and ensure that every patient is being informed of all their treatment options. We also know that disparities in access to screening lead to later stage at diagnosis, resulting in unequal outcomes and reduced longevity in marginalized populations. Patient navigation can address some of the existing imbalances, and we applaud recent progress to make that more accessible to the people who need it. We commend Congress for their World Cancer Day resolution, and call on lawmakers, public and private payers, federal agencies, and local policymakers to continue this important work to help close the care gap.”

“Everyone should have a fair and just opportunity to live a longer, healthier life free from cancer regardless of how much money they make, the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, their disability status, or where they live,” said Lisa A. Lacasse, President, ACS CAN. “Increasing diverse representation in clinical trials, improving access to cancer screening and prevention services and ensuring patient navigation services are accessible to all who are diagnosed with cancer are critical to reducing the cancer burden for everyone. We urge lawmakers to help close the cancer care gap by supporting these policies.”

“We are at a real crossroads regarding the provisioning of cancer care in America,” said Gary A. Puckrein, National Minority Quality Forum President and CEO. “The profound lack of access to early detection and intervention, coupled with a scarcity of robust healthcare infrastructure, exacerbates disparities and propagates a tiered healthcare system, which has permitted medically underserved cancer care communities. While we are encouraged by growing acknowledgement of these issues, NMQF urges lawmakers that the time is now to prioritize the needs of marginalized communities to collectively close the gap in cancer care.”

The ACCE grew out of the joint Elevating Cancer Equity initiative, first launched by NCCN, ACS CAN, and NMQF in 2021. At the time, a working group identified 16 actionable policy changes to address structural inequities in care. Since then, the group has worked with policymakers, regulators, and administrators, to achieve several of those goals. Those successes include legislation directing the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to release guidance on decentralized clinical trials, the inclusion of reimbursement for patient navigation services from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and several state-level initiatives policies to increase access to lung cancer screening.

Visit NCCN.org/wcd to learn more about World Cancer Day and the ACCE’s efforts.

This announcement was originally published February 1, 2024 on the National Comprehensive Cancer Network and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network websites. For a related

article in Cancer Health, see “World Cancer Day 2024 Challenges Those in Power [VIDEO]” and “World Cancer Day: UICC Offers Actionable Recommendations to Close the Care Gap."

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