

Hundreds of Cancer Advocates Gather in DC to Urge Congress to Sustain Vital Research and Prevention Funding

As a critical government funding deadline nears, patients and survivors from across the country unite to ask for continued federal support for lifesaving cancer research and prevention programs.

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As the September 30th government funding deadline nears, more than 700 cancer patients, survivors and advocates from every corner of the United States, including Washington, DC, Guam, and Puerto Rico, are heading to Capitol Hill to make their voices heard. Representing nearly every congressional district in the country, they will ask lawmakers to prioritize cancer research and prevention programs, along with other proven cancer-fighting policies, highlighting the real-life impact these investments have on patients, families and communities nationwide.

As part of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) annual Leadership Summit and Lobby Day, advocates will gather outside the Capitol [on September 16] Tuesday morning ahead of individual meetings with members to remind Congress that the promise of tomorrow's cures is in their hands as they determine funding for federal cancer research and prevention in the coming weeks. Thanks to the federal government's substantial and steady increases in cancer research funding over the last 30 years, discovery and innovation has led to a 34% decline in cancer mortality rates.

However, due to dramatic and unprecedented proposed reductions in research funding, staff eliminations, and policy shifts at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), future cancer cures are in jeopardy if lawmakers don't act. The administration has recommended an \$18 billion cut to the NIH, taking funding back to levels seen in 2003, and as far back as the mid-1980s when considering biomedical inflation. Thankfully, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have rejected these proposed cuts to NIH and NCI, but the fight is far from over. Lawmakers must continue to push for the highest possible increases for cancer research and prevention in a full budget bill.

"With more than 2 million people in America expected to be diagnosed with cancer in 2025, it's more important than ever that we continue funding cancer research and prevention," said Shane

Jacobson, CEO of the American Cancer Society and ACS CAN. “Federal investment in medical research and prevention has enabled millions of Americans to overcome, and in some cases avoid, disease and live happy, healthy lives. Recent breakthroughs in cancer screening, immunotherapy and many other areas are radically transforming patient care. Additionally, investments in biomedical research leads to the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs across the nation that help fuel local economies.”

ACS CAN volunteer advocates will also urge lawmakers to extend the health care tax credits that help make health insurance more affordable for people who buy their coverage through the ACA [the Affordable Care Act] Marketplaces. If Congress doesn’t extend these vital tax credits before they expire at the end of the year, 4.2 million people are projected to become uninsured, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. Terminating health coverage for cancer patients means delaying or even ending treatment. For others, it will mean putting off lifesaving cancer screenings, ultimately leading to later-stage diagnoses when the disease is harder to treat and survive.

“Research has clearly shown that having health insurance is one of the most important factors in better cancer outcomes, so protecting access to affordable, comprehensive insurance is critical in the fight against cancer,” said Lisa Lacasse, president of ACS CAN. “ACS CAN has long advocated for extending the health care tax credits that make health insurance affordable for millions of people, including many cancer patients and survivors. The health tax credits are set to expire at the end of the year, and time is running out for millions of people who depend on them to afford comprehensive health insurance. We are urging Congress to extend the health tax credits before it’s too late.”

In addition to urging lawmakers to boost research and prevention funding and extend the enhanced health care tax credits, ACS CAN volunteer advocates will also encourage lawmakers to pass the Nancy Gardner Sewell Medicare Multi-Cancer Early Detection (MCED) Screening Coverage Act, legislation that would create a clear pathway for Medicare coverage of future MCED tests, once approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and proven effective. MCED tests have the potential to test for multiple cancers at once with a single blood test, adding an important additional option to help detect cancer.

Tuesday’s lobby day on Capitol Hill culminates with ACS CAN’s annual Lights of Hope event starting at 7:00 p.m. at Constitution Gardens. Lights of Hope is a powerful display featuring over 10,000 lights lining the garden’s pond honoring cancer survivors and memorializing those who have died from the disease. This moving display stretches beyond DC, with 85,000 total bags on display at community events across the nation. The annual ceremony delivers a powerful message in hopes of motivating lawmakers to act on policies that will reduce the cancer burden.

Additionally, as part of ACS CAN’s Leadership Summit and Lobby Day, the organization will honor a select group of lawmakers and others who have made exemplary contributions to the cancer fight. The National Distinguished Advocacy Award, ACS CAN’s most prestigious honor, will be presented

to Representative Diana DeGette (D – CO), Senator Thom Tillis (R – NC), Montana State Senator Willis Curdy (D – MT), and New Jersey State Senator Troy Singleton (D – NJ), in recognition of their contributions to the fight against cancer.

ACS CAN's Judicial Advocacy Initiative (JAI) Award will be presented to two individuals, Seth Lloyd from the law firm of Morrison & Foerster, and Thomas Curvin of Eversheds Sutherland, in recognition of their tremendous donations of legal services devoted to ACS CAN's mission to end cancer as we know it for everyone. Lloyd has generously worked with ACS CAN and its partners over the last five years in multiple amicus briefs helping courts understand the importance of access to health care services without discrimination for LGBTQ+ individuals in accordance with the Affordable Care Act. Curvin has spearheaded two amicus briefs for ACS CAN and partners at the US Supreme Court advocating for the civil rights of Medicaid beneficiaries, as well as helping ACS CAN successfully defend the No Surprises Act at the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

"We all know someone whose life has been affected by cancer. Making sure their experiences and voices are heard by policymakers empowers people to fight back against this disease through policy change that can reduce the disease burden for others who come after them," said Kimberly L. Jeffries Leonard, PhD, volunteer chair of ACS CAN's Board of Directors. "We want lawmakers to think of their constituents' stories and the people behind them and make a commitment to take action to defeat cancer."

During the event, ACS CAN also has an ad in the Washington Post urging lawmakers to Fund Research. Fund Cures. Fight Cancer.

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