

Hundreds of Cancer Patients, Survivors Urge Congress to Make Cancer a National Priority

They're in DC to advocate for cancer research funding and to expand access to prostate screenings (notably for Black men) and multi-cancer early detection.

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As Congress works to determine 2024 priorities before the budget deadline at the end of the month, nearly 700 cancer patients, survivors and their loved ones from all 50 states, Washington, DC, Guam and Puerto Rico, and nearly every congressional district, will be on Capitol Hill this week to make clear to members of Congress that cancer must be a national priority.

As part of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) annual Leadership Summit and Lobby Day, advocates will urge lawmakers to increase funding for cancer research and prevention, support legislation that would eliminate out-of-pocket expenses for individuals with the highest risk of developing prostate cancer and create a clear pathway for Medicare coverage of future multi-cancer early detection tests, once approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and proven effective.

"The 200 diseases known as cancer collectively represent a leading cause of death and suffering and will claim the lives of more than 600,000 Americans this year," said Dr. Karen E. Knudsen, CEO of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). "We need Congress to do everything possible to prioritize policies that will reduce the cancer burden, starting with providing sustained and significant increases in federal cancer research funding. It is clear that cancer research saves lives, and that the return on scientific investment is accelerated progress and improved outcomes."

In addition to urging lawmakers to boost research funding, ACS CAN volunteer advocates will also encourage lawmakers to advance the Prostate-Specific Antigen Screening for High-risk Insured Men (PSA Screening for HIM) Act, which would waive out-of-pocket costs for individuals with the highest risk of prostate cancer, including Black men and those with a family history of the disease.

"Breaking down barriers to coverage for lifesaving screenings for those at highest risk of prostate cancer is key to beginning to close the gap on health disparities in our country, particularly as prostate cancer continues to be the leading cause of cancer death for Black men," said Lisa

Lacasse, president of ACS CAN. “We know added cost is a significant obstacle in determining whether an individual is able to remain up to date on their recommended cancer screenings. The PSA Screening for HIM Act would improve health outcomes for our loved ones and neighbors most at-risk by removing out-of-pocket costs for prostate cancer screenings.”

Volunteers will also ask members to support legislation to create a pathway for Medicare to cover new multi-cancer early detection tests once they are approved by the FDA and proven effective. Multi-cancer early detection tests have the potential to test for multiple cancers at once with a single blood test, making them less invasive and more accessible than existing early detection tests. Expanding screening opportunities to traditionally underserved communities would help reduce cancer disparities.

As part of the annual Leadership Summit and Lobby Day, ACS CAN will also host Lights of Hope on Tuesday evening, starting at 7:00 p.m. at Constitution Gardens. Lights of Hope is a solemn display featuring over 10,000 lights lining the garden’s pond honoring cancer survivors and memorializing those who have died from the disease and nearly 70,000 additional bags in similar events nationwide. The annual ceremony, made possible with the generous support of Bristol Myers Squibb, delivers a powerful message of hope nationwide in hopes of motivating lawmakers to act on policies that will reduce the cancer burden.

Additionally, on Tuesday, ACS CAN 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, is being presented to Rep. Brian Higgins (D-NY) in recognition of his longstanding championing of cancer research funding and access to early detection; Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL) for her leadership in advancing legislation that would increase access to multi-cancer early detection tests once FDA-approved and proven effective; and Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) for his long-standing support for increased cancer research funding and funding for Indian Health Services that serve tribal communities.

On Wednesday, Governors Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Roy Cooper (D-NC) will also receive the NDAA award in recognition of their leadership to preserve local authority to enact proven tobacco control policies in Ohio and a successful bipartisan effort to expand access to care through Medicaid to 600,000 North Carolinians respectively. North Carolina Rep. Tim Moore (R), Sen. Phil Berger (R), Rep. Donny Lambeth (R), Sen. Kevin Corbin (R) and Sen. Jim Burgin (R) will also be awarded for their leadership in that state on Medicaid expansion.

ACS CAN’s Judicial Advocacy Initiative (JAI) award, which recognizes excellence in attorneys who generously donate their services to the cancer fight, is being given to a team of Texas lawyers at the law firm of K&L Gates for their efforts leading ACS CAN and other public health groups in preserving critical patient protections under the Affordable Care Act. Adam S. Cooper, Gretchen P. Mahoney, and Beth W. Petronio led the charge to protect access to lifesaving preventive care in the case of *Braidwood v. Becerra*. Cooper and Petronio also helped defend the Affordable Care Act in the case of *California v. Texas*, from the district court level to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“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 Maureen Mann, 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 launched [a national advertising campaign](#) in publications including POLITICO and the Washington Post, as well as social media advertising. The ads remind lawmakers that by fighting cancer through research funding increases, they can actually make it possible for people living in America to enjoy more time and create more moments.

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