AACR Cancer Progress Report Highlights Innovative Cancer Research

Basic, translational and clinical research improves, extends and saves lives.

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Today [September 21], the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) released the 12th edition of its annual Cancer Progress Report, which chronicles how basic, translational, and clinical cancer research, and cancer-related population sciences, primarily supported by federal investments in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI), remain vitally important to improving health and saving lives.

The comprehensive report provides up-to-date cancer incidence, mortality, and survivorship statistics and discusses the latest research in cancer etiology, biology, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-based early detection systems and liquid biopsies that are moving rapidly to the clinic.

Additionally, the report features the personal stories of patients who have benefited from innovative, recently approved anticancer therapeutics. It also addresses ongoing challenges in cancer research, including cancer health disparities and the physical, psychosocial, and financial hardships faced by cancer survivors, and outlines policy recommendations to ensure that the U.S. maintains its momentum against cancer for all patients.

“Basic research discoveries have driven the remarkable advances that we’ve seen in cancer medicine in recent years,” said AACR President Lisa M. Coussens, PhD, FAACR. “Targeted therapies, immunotherapy, and other new therapeutic approaches being applied clinically all stem from fundamental discoveries in basic science. Investment in cancer science, as well as support for science education at all levels, is absolutely essential to drive the next wave of discoveries and accelerate progress.”

American Association for Cancer Research

Ongoing Progress for Patients

Cancer researchers continue to make advances that improve, extend, and save lives. The following section highlights progress during the 12 months covered by the report (August 1, 2021 to July 31, 2022):

- More people than ever before are living longer and fuller lives after a cancer diagnosis, with more than 18 million people with a history of cancer living in the U.S. as of January 2022.
- The decline in the rate of cancer mortality has accelerated in recent years, as reflected by a 2.3 percent decrease in cancer deaths every year between 2016 and 2019.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved eight new anticancer therapeutics, including the first drug to treat uveal melanoma, the most common form of eye cancer in adults; the first molecularly targeted therapeutic for treatment of cancer patients with Von Hippel-Lindau syndrome, a rare inherited genetic disorder; and the first new immune checkpoint

inhibitor against a novel target in eight years.

- In addition, the FDA expanded the use of 10 anticancer therapeutics and approved two new diagnostic imaging agents.
- There has been intense research and exciting progress in the use of AI in the clinic, leading to numerous FDA approvals for AI-based tools that can help clinicians detect cancers earlier in their evolution and provide more complete diagnoses, with potentially curative outcomes.

Challenges Require Continued Investment in Cancer Research

Despite the unprecedented progress being made against cancer in recent years, this complex disease remains a significant threat to human health around the world. In the U.S. alone, it is estimated that more than 600,000 lives will be lost to cancer in 2022.

As discussed in the AACR Cancer Progress Report 2022, cancer research and patient care face several challenges:

- Cancer health disparities are a pervasive public health problem, with racial and ethnic minorities and other medically underserved U.S. populations shouldering a disproportionally higher burden of cancer. While advances have been made in identifying, understanding, and addressing some of these disparities, more research—along with policy solutions—are urgently needed to ensure equitable progress against cancer.
- The recent Supreme Court decision and subsequent legislative action in many states restricting reproductive rights will have serious detrimental effects on access to quality health care, including for patients with cancer. Reluctance or delay in starting cancer treatment because that treatment may lead to the termination of a pregnancy could lead to cancer progression, making it more difficult to treat and more likely to threaten the life of the woman.
- Global crises, such as ongoing wars and the COVID-19 pandemic, have impacted all aspects of cancer research and patient care. Coupled with an aging global population, researchers caution that the burden of cancer worldwide may rise significantly in the coming decades.

To mitigate these and other challenges, and to enable sustained progress for all patients, the AACR Cancer Progress Report 2022 lays out clear policy recommendations and calls on Congress to take specific actions, including:

- Continue to support robust, sustained, and predictable annual funding growth in the NIH and NCI budgets by providing increases of at least $4.1 billion and $853 million, respectively, in their fiscal year 2023 base budgets;
- Fully fund initiatives authorized in the 21st Century Cures Act, including the National Cancer Moonshot;
- Reauthorize the comprehensive Childhood Cancer Survivorship, Treatment, Access, and Research (STAR) Act and provide at least $30 million for the Act’s implementation;

- Invest in vital cancer-related initiatives at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA;
- Expand Medicaid to ensure that patients with cancer have equitable access to quality, affordable health care; and
- Structure tax policies to encourage philanthropic giving so that nonprofit cancer research organizations will be able to continue to fund high-risk, high-reward research proposals and thereby accelerate the discovery of new treatments and cures.

“Thanks to the bipartisan leadership in Congress that has delivered steady, significant annual funding increases for NIH in recent years, we have never been in a better position to take lifesaving cancer science from the bench to the clinic,” said Margaret Foti, PhD, MD (hc), chief executive officer of the AACR. “Ensuring that medical research remains a high priority for our nation’s policy makers is vital if we are to maintain the momentum in advances against cancer, especially as we recover from the devastating impact of COVID-19 on cancer research and patient care.”

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