New Report Finds More Than a Third of States Falling Short on Policies to Fight Cancer

Report Details State Legislative Progress on Issues Key to Eradicating the Disease

More than a third of states are not measuring up in the fight against cancer by failing to implement laws and policies that help people fight the disease, according to a new report evaluating state legislative activity on cancer policy issues. The report, developed by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network(SM) (ACS CAN) in collaboration with its partner charitable organization, the American Cancer Society, found that 20 states reached benchmarks on either none or only one of the six legislative priority areas measured in the report.

How Do You Measure Up?: A Progress Report on State Legislative Activity to Reduce Cancer Incidence and Mortality was released today at the National Conference of State Legislatures annual meeting in New Orleans, LA.

"With the death rate from cancer continuing a decline that began in 1991, we have made great progress in the fight against cancer," said Daniel E. Smith, president of ACS CAN. "Further progress requires state legislators to make fighting cancer a priority. It's time for all state legislators to do their part by enacting state legislation critical to defeating this deadly disease."

The report measures state policies on six priority areas: breast and cervical cancer early detection program funding; access to care for the uninsured; colorectal screening coverage laws; smoke-free laws; pain management; and tobacco taxes. Failure to address these issues effectively places barriers in front of those who seek proper diagnosis, treatment and care when facing cancer.

A color-coded system is used to identify how well a state is doing. Green represents the benchmark position with well-balanced policies and good practices; yellow indicates moderate movement toward the benchmark and red shows where states are falling short.

None of the states met the benchmark in all six policy areas measured in the report.

Seven states -- Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Tennessee -- did not meet the benchmark on any of the six issues and another 13 received high marks on only one issue.

"As advocates, we have the responsibility to educate our constituents on how to prevent and fight cancer effectively," said Laura J. Hilderley, RN, MS, volunteer chair of the ACS CAN board of directors. "But we cannot do it without the help of state and local policymakers. ACS CAN joins the Society in urging legislators to remove those barriers that prevent the proper diagnosis, treatment and care of cancer patients."

Between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008, five states implemented comprehensive smoke-free laws, protecting workers and patrons from the hazards of secondhand smoke and ensuring that more than 60 percent of the U.S. population is covered by such laws.

In addition, 10 states increased their match funding for the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, and a number of states created new programs to screen uninsured residents for colon cancer.

Five states increased their tobacco taxes, bringing to 44 the number of states with tobacco tax increases since 2002. Nearly half the country met ACS CAN's and the Society's benchmark of raising the tobacco excise tax to at least $1.14 per pack of cigarettes. Statistics have shown that increasing the cigarette tax is one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking, especially among children. Studies show that every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes reduces youth smoking by 7 percent and overall cigarette consumption by about 4 percent.

Other findings detailed in the report:

-- Only eight states have reached benchmarks in providing screenings for breast and cervical cancer early detection.

-- Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia have laws that ensure private insurance coverage for the full range of colon cancer screening tests.

-- Twenty-five states have uninsured rates of 16 percent (the national average) or higher.

-- Twenty-seven states met the benchmark on cancer pain management policy and practice.

-- 2008 is the second consecutive year that Florida, Tennessee, and South Carolina have not hit a single benchmark.

The report also covers the challenges of ensuring access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans. This year, more than 1.4 million people in America will be diagnosed with cancer and another 565,000 will die from the disease. Almost 47 million people in America are uninsured and more than 25 million are underinsured. Countless Americans are needlessly losing their battle against cancer because they cannot gain access to the lifesaving care they need. ACS CAN, in partnership with the Society, is dedicated to ensuring that quality health care is available to all Americans. Meaningful reform must include adequate, available, affordable, and administratively simple health insurance coverage for all, regardless of health status or risk.

Other issues examined in the report include: tobacco cessation services and tobacco prevention program funding, nutrition and physical activity, Medicaid and cancer treatment and high-risk health insurance pools.

A copy of the complete report is available online at www.acscan.org.

ACS CAN, the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy partner of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard. For more information, visit www.acscan.org.

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