American Cancer Society and American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network Mark 50th Anniversary of Surgeon General's Report on Tobacco and Health, Cite Remarkable Progress

But Groups Say Work Remains to Further Reduce Number Of Lives Lost to Smoking-Related Cancers

ATLANTA, Jan. 8, 2014 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- As the nation marks the 50th anniversary this month of the first U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Tobacco and Health, the American Cancer Society and its nonpartisan advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), point to remarkable progress in the fight against tobacco and the resulting lives saved from cancer. Since the release of the landmark report in 1964, the percentage of American adults who smoke has been cut by more than half, down from over 40 percent to less than 20 percent today. But with more than 43million Americans still lighting up and tobacco use remaining the single largest preventable cause of premature death in the United States, the Society and ACS CAN say they are committed to further reducing smoking and saving more lives from cancer.

(Photo: http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20140108/DC42820)

"The Surgeon General's report brought about a sea change in the way people think about tobacco 50 years ago and forever changed the course of public health," said John R. Seffrin, Ph.D., chief executive officer of the Society and ACS CAN. "Before the release of the report, nearly half of American adults smoked, and less than half of the American population believed that smoking was in any way linked to cancer. Surgeon General Luther Terry's findings were the impetus the country needed to intensify public education efforts about the dangers of smoking and pass proven tobacco control policies that have dramatically reduced the smoking rate and saved millions of lives.

"The American Cancer Society and ACS CAN have played a central role in the nationwide decrease in smoking," Seffrin said. "In fact, less smoking may be the biggest reason that death rates from cancer have declined since the early 90s, saving 300 more lives per day. But with tobacco still the primary cause of lung cancer, the No. 1 cause of cancer death, we have more work to do to prevent many more thousands of needless deaths every year."

Currently, smoke-free workplace laws protect 49 percent of the U.S. population from the dangers of secondhand smoke. Yet, 43.8 million Americans still smoke cigarettes. Smoking-related diseases remain the world's most preventable cause of death. The American Cancer Society and ACS CAN have been leaders in supporting proven policies that reduce smoking rates and overall tobacco consumption and help reduce unnecessary death and suffering from tobacco use.

"The public strongly supports tobacco control policies that are proven to help people quit smoking and keep kids from ever starting the deadly habit," said Chris Hansen, president of ACS CAN. "We must increase the number of states and communities with smoke-free workplace

laws, pass significant increases in tobacco taxes that discourage smoking and fully fund tobacco prevention and cessation programs. Lawmakers can play a significant role in the fight to end disease and death from tobacco use, and ACS CAN remains committed to working with all levels of government to end the tobacco epidemic in our country."

The cost of tobacco, both from a health and financial standpoint, is staggering. In the United States, tobacco use is responsible for nearly one in five deaths, or about 443,000 premature deaths every year. Tobacco use accounts for at least 30 percent of all cancer deaths and 80 percent of lung cancer deaths. Each year, an estimated 3,400 non-smoking adults die of lung cancer as a result of breathing second-hand smoke. Cigarette smoking costs the United States more than $193 billion a year ($97 billion in lost productivity plus $96 billion in health care expenditures).

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers saving lives and fighting for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. As the largest voluntary health organization, the Society's efforts have contributed to a 20 percent decline in cancer death rates in the U.S. since 1991, and a 50 percent drop in smoking rates. Thanks in part to our progress nearly 14 million Americans who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will celebrate more birthdays this year. As we mark our 100th birthday in 2013, we're determined to finish the fight against cancer. We're finding cures as the nation's largest private, not-for-profit investor in cancer research, ensuring people facing cancer have the help they need and continuing the fight for access to quality health care, lifesaving screenings, clean air, and more. For more information, to get help, or to join the fight, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit www.cancer.org/fight

About The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
ACS CAN, the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate 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.

SOURCE American Cancer Society