Cancer Moonshot Panel Details Necessary Steps to Accelerate Cancer Research and Prevention

American Cancer Society's advocacy affiliate, ACS CAN, calls on Congress to act to begin implementing recommendations with existing legislative proposals

Washington, D.C.—September 7, 2016—Today the National Cancer Moonshot Blue Ribbon Panel released its recommendations aimed at accelerating cancer research in the next five years. The report outlines 10 focus areas that bring together science, technology and advocacy.

Among the recommendations, the panel suggests development of a large-scale patient network to gather information about tumor profiles and treatment outcomes to gain more precise knowledge about what works, in whom, and for which types of cancer. This network would also enhance our ability to match patients with relevant clinical trials.

Additionally, the panel recommends a Cancer Immunotherapy Clinical Trials Network that would develop and implement a national strategy to discover and evaluate approaches that harness the body's own immune system to prevent and treat both adult and pediatric cancers.

The report calls for the acceleration of research that will help improve symptom care for cancer patients and survivors. Better symptom management is viewed as important to not only improving the quality of life for patients and survivors but also patient adherence to treatment.

The panel also included a recommendation that focuses on implementing evidence-based approaches to prevention and early detection. This recommendation calls for new initiatives to improve early detection, genetic testing and genetic counseling. The report notes that research should also focus on improving the broad adoption of proven prevention strategies, including colorectal screening, HPV vaccination, tobacco control, and identifying individuals with a genetic predisposition to cancer.

"The release of these recommendations signifies an important next step in our effort as a nation to identify ways to reduce death and suffering from cancer, and we are pleased the administration continues to maintain a heightened national focus on a disease that is expected to kill more than 595,000 in the United States this year," said Otis Brawley, chief medical officer for the American Cancer Society and a member of the Blue Ribbon Panel Implementation Science Working Group. "To truly maximize our potential to accelerate progress we must support new scientific investigation while simultaneously making the benefits of completed prevention and treatment research available to the entire population."

The American Cancer Society's advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), believes that a number of the panel's recommendations could be acted upon quickly through proposals and prevention programs already before Congress, or pending Obama administration action including: managing patients' symptoms through palliative care, curbing tobacco-related cancers through effective tobacco control programs and increasing access to colorectal cancer screenings.

The report also provides Congress an historic opportunity to build on last year's bipartisan-supported funding increases for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) by increasing funding by $680 million in the FY17 budget for a total of $1 billon over two years. In addition to increasing the baseline budget for the NIH and NCI, Congress could ensure sustained and robust funding for cancer research by passing the 21st Century Cures Act including $2 billion in mandatory funding for medical research at the NIH for each of the next five years.

"Congress should seize this historic opportunity—when researchers are on the brink of so many new and potentially life-saving developments in diagnostic tests and treatments—to boost funding for the NIH and NCI," said Gary Reedy, CEO of the American Cancer Society and ACS CAN. "Much of the major progress we've

achieved in cancer research over the last 50 years has started with research led by the NIH and NCI. Now is the time to re-invest and accelerate that research."

The Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act (H.R. 3119/S. 2748) is scheduled for a hearing in the House Energy and Commerce Committee tomorrow, September 8. The bill, which has strong bipartisan support, would increase federal research on palliative care and pain and symptom management, and enhance training for nurses, doctors, social workers, and other health care specialists to practice palliative care effectively.

Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control's Office on Smoking and Health and its colorectal cancer control program are slated for significant cuts under the House Labor, Health and Human Services Committee proposed spending bill. And the Removing Barriers to Colorectal Cancer Screening Act, which would eliminate costly co-insurance for colorectal cancer screenings under Medicare, is languishing in committee despite substantial bipartisan support in the House and Senate.

"As we well know and the Blue Ribbon Panel affirms, prevention coupled with research can dramatically reduce the number of cancer deaths and suffering," said Chris Hansen, president of ACS CAN. "We urge Congress to restore funding for the CDC's critical tobacco control and cancer screening programs and to take action to close the Medicare loophole that forces seniors to weigh their health against the cost of a potentially lifesaving colorectal cancer screening. Bringing together research, prevention and improved patient care will go a long way toward achieving the Moonshot goals over the next five years."

In conjunction with the National Cancer Moonshot Summit hosted by Vice President Biden in June, the American Cancer Society announced its goal to double its current research budget over the next five years. That funding would allow for new grants at academic research institutions across the country as well as continued intramural research in cancer epidemiology, surveillance and health services, behavioral research, and economics and health policy. ACS research programs are comprehensive across all aspects of cutting-edge cancer research. Since 1946, ACS has spent more than $4.5 billion to find cancer cures and forty-seven ACS-funded researchers been awarded the Nobel Prize.