American Cancer Society Names Dr. Karen Knudsen as its Next CEO

Knudsen will be the 107-year-old organization’s first female CEO



Karen E. Knudsen, MBA, Ph.D., will be the next chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society (ACS) and its advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), starting June 1, 2021. She will take the reins from the retiring Gary Reedy, who has served as both organizations’ CEO since 2015.

The hiring of a female CEO signals a new era for the 107-year-old American Cancer Society, where all of its past top leaders were men, even though its Women’s Field Army was credited for building what became the modern American Cancer Society. Knudsen will also be the first scientific and oncology researcher to serve in the top staff position in the modern era.

Knudsen currently serves as executive vice president of Oncology Services and enterprise director for Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Jefferson Health, one of only 71 National Cancer Institute-Designated Cancer Centers recognized for its research and impact on cancer outcomes. She also holds leadership roles with some of the most important cancer entities in the nation. She is the president of the Association of American Cancer Institutes, where her platform has focused on diversity, equity and inclusion, and serves on the board of directors for the American Association of Cancer Research and the board of advisors for the National Cancer Institute. She is active in committees for the American Society for Clinical Oncology, in addition to serving on other academic and for-profit advisory boards. Knudsen holds a bachelor's degree in biology from the George Washington University; a Ph.D. in biological sciences from the University of California San Diego; and an MBA from Temple University Fox School of Business.

“Dr. Knudsen is exactly what the American Cancer Society needs right now,” said John Alfonso, CPA, chair of the American Cancer Society Board of Directors. “She is an accomplished researcher, innovative healthcare executive, dynamic leader of a prestigious cancer center, and true thought leader in the fight against cancer nationwide.”

Knudsen expects to spend a great deal of time initially listening to and learning from the American Cancer Society's various stakeholders, but she’s also eager to work with volunteers and staff to shape the vision and deliver tangible results.

“As director of the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Jefferson Health, I've experienced firsthand how the American Cancer Society improves the lives of cancer patients and their families through discovery, advocacy, and direct patient support,” Knudsen said. “I share the Board of Directors' vision to ensure that ACS’s impact benefits all people throughout the nation. With creativity, innovation, and novel partnerships, we will accelerate the mission and save lives.”

Knudsen will also serve as CEO of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, which advocates for evidence-based public policy change to make cancer a top nationwide priority. As an NCI-funded researcher and the head of a major cancer research institution, she knows firsthand the critical role government plays in saving more lives from cancer. The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI), for which Knudsen currently serves as president, is also an important voice in advocating for funding for cancer research and access to care, including patient access to research innovations. AACI is a member of the One Voice Against Cancer Coalition, which was founded by ACS CAN in 2000 to bring public health organizations together to advocate for greater federal investments in cancer research.

Additional background information about Dr. Knudsen:

Dr. Knudsen Resume

Dr. Knudsen CV

High-resolution photographs of Dr. Knudsen for use by media:

Dr. Knudsen Photo 1

Dr. Knudsen Photo 2

Dr. Knudsen Photo 3
