American Cancer Society Announces New Center for Diversity in Cancer Research Training

ATLANTA, Feb. 21, 2023 – To address the lack of diversity in research environments, the American Cancer Society (ACS) has announced the creation of the American Cancer Society Center for Diversity in Cancer Research Training. The new center will supplement the traditional academic journey, focusing on meeting potential researchers where they are and helping them overcome barriers to future success. Initial programming will support underrepresented high school, college, and post-baccalaureate students and include exposure to oncology and cancer research as a career; mentorship; hands-on research experiences; and career development. The aim is to increase efforts to recruit and nurture individuals from diverse backgrounds within scientific and clinical training environments.

“The center is a perfect way to build upon the Diversity in Cancer Research internship program we launched in 2021,” said Dr. Ellie Daniels, MPH, senior vice president of the center. “Its success caused us to think about the support we could provide more broadly. Inequities impact cancer outcomes in tangible and intangible ways. Working to remove the academic barriers people of color face allows us to grow a pipeline of well-qualified researchers who have a unique connection to the communities we need to impact.”

Diverse voices are critical in improving inequities in cancer prevention, treatment, and care. Unfortunately, the racial and ethnic communities that bear a disproportionate burden of cancer continue to be underrepresented in the cancer research workforce. For example, while the number of biomedical scientists in the U.S. has grown since the 1990s, the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics in biomedical careers is lowest among any ethnic group. Further, funding rates for the National Institute of Health’s R01 grant program, which serves as a catalyzing milestone in the academic careers of many research scientists, remains lowest for African American applicants at 16.6 percent compared to 27.8 percent for White applicants. These numbers are largely attributed to low rates of representation in scientific education and training. People of color represent 20 percent of first-year college students pursuing degrees in science and engineering. The numbers decrease as these students move through their education with 17 percent receiving a bachelor’s degree and only 10 percent completing advanced degrees in these disciplines.

“Enhancing diversity in cancer research and cancer care are key components of our goal to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. We are proud of our more than a century old track record of funding impactful science that improves the lives of cancer patients and their families,” said Dr. Karen E. Knudsen, CEO of the American Cancer Society. “This new initiative will further enhance these capabilities and expand the expert breadth of voices and innovative strategies to accelerate progress against cancer.”

An inclusive research community more effectively addresses cancer disparities, invigorates problem-solving, drives innovation and ultimately, accelerates the American Cancer Society’s vision to end cancer as we know it for everyone. As the largest nonprofit funder of cancer research in the U.S. outside of the federal government, the organization has a history of investing in new researchers and has funded 50 Nobel Prize-winning scientists. With a new center focused on broadening the pool of diverse researchers, the American Cancer Society is acting on its long-standing commitment to support the best minds in cancer research, ensure scientific excellence and make the greatest impact possible. To learn more, visit cancer.org/diversityinresearch.

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About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 100 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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