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Commentary

Looking Ahead

Forging a Path for 2020 and Beyond

By Jennifer W. Pegher, MA



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Commentary Overview

- A recent report from the American Cancer Society shows encouraging progress in the fight against cancer.
- Experts attribute the decline in the U.S. cancer mortality rate to a combination of factors, including improvements in cancer treatment and prevention, and a reduction in smoking.
- Areas for improvement include addressing racial and socioeconomic disparities and increasing HPV vaccination rates.
- Through advocacy, education, and collaboration, AACI will continue to empower North American cancer centers to tackle these challenges.

The past year was filled with significant accomplishments for AACI. In 2019 AACI grew its membership, established a Conflict of Interest Task Force, awarded patient advocate scholarships for its annual Hill Day, hosted its first CAR T therapy symposium, and continued to engage members through innovative programming.

The year was also personally significant: 2019 marked my first full year as the association's executive director. As we embark on a new decade, I am honored to be leading AACI at a pivotal moment, both for the association and for the greater cancer research community.

Encouraging Progress

Earlier this month, the [American Cancer Society \(ACS\)](#) published a [report](#) of cancer statistics highlighting the steady decline for more than two decades in the cancer mortality rate in the United States.

The report focused on improvements in early detection, cancer staging, and surgical techniques, as well as the development of innovative therapies, as factors that have contributed to this positive shift. This underscores the value of AACI cancer centers, which are working to translate research findings into new approaches for cancer prevention and treatment.

Emphasizing the importance of advocating for sound public health policy, the report noted that the steep drop in cancer deaths between 2016 and 2017—the most recent period measured—was spurred by a decline in deaths from lung cancer — the leading cause of cancer mortality. This was due to a combination of scientific advances and an overall reduction in smoking, particularly among youth.

Thanks to the efforts of public health advocacy groups and AACI cancer centers, this trend is likely to continue now that Tobacco 21 is the law of the land — the federal legislation raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco to 21 went into effect last month. Through its [Public Policy Resource Library](#), AACI continues to advocate for comprehensive tobacco reform that addresses the rise in vaping among teens and young adults.

Room for Improvement

Areas for improvement named in the ACS report included reducing disparities in cancer incidence and survival—particularly among underrepresented racial and socioeconomic groups—and increasing uptake of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. AACI identified these objectives among its policy priorities for 2020, which also include a ban on sales of all flavored vaping and tobacco products, oral chemotherapy parity, and a strong federal investment in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

Our cancer centers' research discoveries lay the foundation for tomorrow's cures, and researchers rely on robust funding increases to build on decades of momentum. AACI will continue its efforts to increase the NCI payline, which lags behind that of other NIH institutes.

Charting a Course for the Future

Beyond 2020, AACI has taken steps to ensure a bright future for the association and its members. To chart AACI's course for the next three to five years, the AACI Board of Directors convened a purpose workshop last fall where participants defined the role of the association and solidified a common vision.

During the workshop, board members identified five key areas in which AACI excels. In the coming year, AACI will focus on providing a unifying platform to allow its members to develop best practices, receive high quality education, engage in meaningful advocacy activities, advance public policy, and collaborate with other members across North America. AACI leadership will work together to articulate goals, develop strategies, and measure success in these areas.

As AACI grows and evolves to meet its members' needs, its mission will remain constant. The association will continue to serve as a rallying point for cancer centers, enhancing their ability to work together with the overall goal of improving patient care.

On behalf of AACI, I extend my sincere appreciation for the continued support of the cancer centers, corporate roundtable, and sustaining members that work to accelerate progress against cancer. We look forward to serving you in 2020 and for many years to come.

Our Mission

Representing 100 of North America's premier academic and freestanding cancer centers, the Association of American Cancer Institutes is dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer by enhancing the impact of leading cancer centers.

About AACI Commentary

To promote the work of its members, AACI publishes *Commentary*, a monthly editorial series focusing on major issues of common interest to North American cancer centers, authored by cancer center leaders and subject matter experts.



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