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Commentary

Cancer research isn't a budget line item. It's a lifeline.

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This special edition of *AACI Commentary* is co-authored by the leaders of national organizations representing patients impacted by the five major cancers responsible for the highest number of cancer-related deaths in the U.S.—breast, colorectal, lung,

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pancreatic, and prostate—and our nation's cancer centers, including the 73 centers designated by the National Cancer Institute.

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For more than five decades, federal investments in cancer research have helped transform what was once a terminal diagnosis into a survivable disease for millions of Americans. Today, more than 18 million people in the United States are cancer survivors – nearly six times as many as when the National Cancer Act was signed in 1971.

This extraordinary progress is a testament to what is possible when research is prioritized, and patients are at the center of innovation. However, our work is not done. Millions of Americans are still being diagnosed with and dying from cancer each year.

The investments that drive progress are now at grave risk.

As the leaders of national organizations representing patients impacted by the five major cancers responsible for the highest number of cancer-related deaths in the U.S.—breast, colorectal, lung, pancreatic, and prostate—and our nation's cancer centers, we know that sustained, robust federal support is crucial to saving lives.

Cancer research isn't a budget line item. It's alifeline.

The administration's **proposed 2026 budget** includes a 40 percent reduction in funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Cuts of this magnitude would delay lifesaving treatments, stall clinical trials, and upend the momentum we've spent decades building. Over the coming months, the House will consider the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee appropriations bill that determines the budgets for the NIH and NCI. We urge lawmakers to reject these devastating cuts and protect the federal funding that fuels lifesaving discoveries, innovation, and hope.

More than 2 million Americans will hear the words “you have cancer” this year alone. While survival rates have improved overall, cancer incidence continues to rise, particularly among younger adults.

Recent research shows that since 1975, the rate of cancer in people under 50 has increased by roughly 25 percent, outpacing incidence rates in older adults. Young people are seeing rising rates of colorectal, breast, pancreatic, and lung cancers, among others – a **trend** observed not only in the U.S., but **globally**. We are only beginning to understand the causes of this surge in cancer cases, but one thing is clear: research is the only path to the answers we seek.

Thanks to NIH-funded breakthroughs, once-deadly cancers are now being treated more effectively. Immunotherapies are harnessing the body's own defenses to fight cancer. Advances in precision medicine are matching patients with treatments tailored to their tumors. Early detection tools, including liquid biopsies, are helping to diagnose cancer when it's most treatable. Remarkable new discoveries are made each day and many more are on the horizon.

This is not the moment to step back.

When funding is slashed, or even threatened, research slows. Clinical trials are halted. Promising science is shelved. And patients—real people with real families, friends, and communities—face more barriers to accessing the treatments that could save or extend their lives.

We know this because we hear from patients every day. They are looking for answers. For access. For time. They don't need political games. They need progress.

We urge Congress to reject these dangerous cuts and reaffirm America's commitment to

conquering cancer. For the millions of Americans living with, at risk for, or newly diagnosed with cancer, we must keep moving forward. Lives depend on it.



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