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Former AACI Board Member Assumes Leadership of National Cancer Institute

As the new director of the National Cancer Institute, Norman “Ned” Sharpless, MD, can already claim a close working relationship with an organization that represents 97 of North America’s leading cancer research centers.

Dr. Sharpless was officially sworn in October 17 as head of NCI. Before assuming the nation’s top cancer federal leadership post, he served on the board of directors of the Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) and was director of the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, an AACI member.

AACI’s membership includes 67 cancer centers that have received designation from the NCI in recognition of their scientific leadership, resources, and the depth and breadth of their research in basic, clinical, and/or population science. Academic-based cancer research programs that receive NCI support, along with two Canadian cancer centers, round out AACI’s membership roster.

“AACI is delighted that Dr. Sharpless has been sworn in as NCI director,” said AACI Executive Director Barbara Duffy Stewart, MPH. “As a former cancer center director and member of AACI’s board of directors, he has first-hand knowledge of the unique contributions of the nation’s cancer centers and we look forward to supporting him as he takes on this important leadership role.”

Dr. Sharpless became director of UNC Lineberger on January 1, 2014, and he was the Wellcome Distinguished Professor in Cancer Research at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. A practicing oncologist caring for patients with leukemia, Dr. Sharpless also led a research group studying the cell cycle and its role in cancer and aging. He has authored more than 150 original scientific papers, reviews and book chapters. He holds 10 patents that form the core intellectual property of two North Carolina-based biotechnology startup companies.

“Ned is an accomplished physician-scientist and a strong advocate for both basic and translational cancer research,” said AACI President Stanton L. Gerson, MD, director of the Case Comprehensive Cancer Center at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland. “As a fellow leader of an NCI-designated cancer center, I congratulate Ned and look forward to his guidance at the national level.”

AACI also extends its gratitude to Douglas R. Lowy, MD, for his more than two years of service as NCI’s acting director. Both through his talks at AACI annual meetings and policy forums, and his ready availability to AACI members, Dr. Lowy has been a vital partner of the association and has guided NCI with exemplary leadership and a deep knowledge of the nation’s cancer center operations. Dr. Lowy has served as NCI acting director since Harold Varmus, MD, stepped down in 2015.



Association of American Cancer Institutes

A key element of AACI's mission is to assist cancer centers in keeping pace with the changing landscape in science, technology, and health care. AACI does this by gathering and sharing best practices among cancer centers, providing a forum for its members to address common challenges and explore new opportunities, supporting initiatives that engage the membership in developing specific recommendations to NCI, and educating policy makers about the important role cancer centers play in advancing cancer discovery.

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The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) comprises 97 premier academic and freestanding cancer research centers in the US and Canada. AACI is dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer by enhancing the impact of the leading academic cancer centers.