



Association of American Cancer Institutes

For more information, contact:

[Chris Zurawsky](#)

Director of Communications and Public Affairs
412-770-5409

[Emily Stimmel](#)

Communications and External Relations Manager
724-787-5286

October 2, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AACI Awards Recognize Excellence in Science, Philanthropy, Health Equity, and Public Service

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) congratulates this year's [Distinguished Scientist](#), [Cancer Health Equity](#), [Champion for Cures](#), and [Public Service](#) award recipients. The awards will be presented during the [2025 AACI/CCAF Annual Meeting](#) in Washington, DC.

The Distinguished Scientist Award will be presented to **Thomas F. Gajewski, MD, PhD**, an internationally recognized leader in the field of cancer immunotherapy. For over 25 years Dr. Gajewski has identified fundamental mechanisms of the anti-tumor immune response and applied that information to novel immunotherapeutic interventions in patients to understand mechanisms of resistance. This iterative cycle has led Dr. Gajewski to make a series of fundamental discoveries, contributing to new drug development in the clinic. A creative and prolific investigator, he has established several key biologic principles that have far-reaching implications for continued clinical advancement.

John D. Carpten, PhD, director of City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center and Beckman Research Institute, is the recipient of the Cancer Health Equity Award. Dr. Carpten's pioneering work in genome science and health disparities research has transformed cancer care, expanding representation in scientific research and advancing equitable health outcomes through strategic partnerships and community engagement initiatives. As an individual and team scientist, Dr. Carpten investigated and published the first genome-wide scan for prostate cancer genes, helped develop the African American Hereditary Prostate Cancer study network, and was one of the first to publish on the genomic landscape of myeloma tumors from African American patients. He has also mentored a diverse group of students and trainees, many of whom have gone on to careers in medicine with others who hold faculty and academic leadership positions. Dr. Carpten's work reflects his deep personal and professional commitment to justice, representation, and opportunity in medicine and science.

The **11 Day Power Play, Inc.** will be honored with the Champion for Cures Award. Since the organization was founded by Mike and Amy Lesakowski in 2016, the 11 Day Power Play has contributed more than \$7 million to cancer research and wellness programs at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. These funds have supported quality-of-life care for patients and caregivers through The 11 Day Power Play



Association of American Cancer Institutes

Cancer Resource Center, providing the naming gift for The 11 Day Power Play Immunotherapy Labs, and establishing The 11 Day Power Play Team Science Award to kickstart promising research with lifesaving potential. In addition to Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, the organization supports Make-A-Wish Western New York, Camp Good Days and Special Times, and the Roswell Park & Oishei Children's Cancer and Blood Disorders Program.

The Distinguished Scientist, Cancer Health Equity, and Champion for Cures awards will be presented on **Monday, October 20**. On **Tuesday, October 21**, the Public Service Award will be presented to **Senator Katie Britt (R-AL)** and **Representative Joaquin Castro (D-TX)** in recognition of their steadfast support of federal funding for cancer research and cancer centers in their respective states.

The [AACI awards program](#) was established in 2002 with the Distinguished Scientist Award. The Champion for Cures Award was introduced in 2018, followed by the Cancer Health Equity Award in 2021. The Public Service Award has been presented to Members of Congress in alternating years since 2003.

###

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents over 100 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in the United States and Canada. AACI is accelerating progress against cancer by enhancing the impact of academic cancer centers and promoting cancer health equity. For more information, please visit aaci-cancer.org.