Association of American Cancer Institutes

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

More Than 400 Cancer Center Leaders, Researchers, and Advocates to Gather in Chicago for AACI/CCAF Annual Meeting

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) will host the 2026 AACI/CCAF Annual Meeting in partnership with the Cancer Center Administrators Forum (CCAF), **October 25-27**, at the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile. The three-day conference brings together leaders of North American cancer centers with key stakeholders from national cancer research and advocacy groups, industry, and government health agencies to accelerate progress against cancer.

Panel discussions, fireside chats, and sessions tailored to physician clinical leaders, new cancer center directors, and government affairs professionals will highlight topics that matter to AACI members, including leadership strategies, breakthroughs and challenges in research and development, innovations in cancer care, and federal agency updates and goals.

At 2:00 pm central time on **Sunday, October 25**, **Peter A. James, PhD**, will deliver the opening keynote, "Hope Is a Strategy: Sustaining Yourself While Leading Change You Don't Control." Drawing on experiences spanning business, military, and academic settings, Dr. James, president and CEO of HCG Strategic Partners, will share how cancer center leaders can implement lasting, meaningful change at their institutions. At 3:15 pm CT, **Krzysztof Ptak, PhD, MBA**, director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Office of Cancer Centers, will provide crucial updates on NCI priorities and their potential impact on cancer centers.

On **Monday, October 26**, AACI will honor champions in health equity, philanthropy, and scientific discovery during an awards ceremony beginning at 10:45 am CT. **Lucile L. Adams-Campbell, PhD**, will receive the 2026 AACI Cancer Health Equity Award in recognition of her work to promote community-based research at the Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, where she leads the Ralph Lauren Center for Cancer Prevention. The 2026 AACI Champion for Cures Award will be presented to the **Cattlemen's Ball of Nebraska, Inc.**, which has raised more than $21 million to support cancer research at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center in Omaha. Finally, the 2026 AACI Distinguished Scientist Award will be presented to **Rafi Ahmed, PhD**, director of the Emory Vaccine Center at Emory University

School of Medicine, co-leader of the Cancer Immunology Research Program at Winship Cancer Institute of Emory University, and a Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar. Dr. Ahmed will also deliver a Distinguished Scientist Keynote on the implications of T cell exhaustion for cancer immunotherapy.

On **Tuesday, October 27**, sessions will explore drivers of the current crisis in clinical research, from increasing competition with industry-sponsored trials to declining institutional support; what China's rapidly expanding footprint in biomedical research means for U.S. competitiveness and national security; and promising translational research from leading academic cancer centers. The conference will close with a report from NCI Director **Anthony Letai, MD, PhD**.

Preceding the annual meeting, on **Saturday, October 24**, AACI and the Cancer Center Network will co-host the 2026 Impact Summit. **Merck** provided an educational grant for this dynamic event, which focuses on strengthening the future of cancer center leadership and workforce development.

The fourth cohort of emerging oncology leaders will convene **Saturday, October 24** and **Sunday, October 25** for the 2026 AACI Leadership Development Workshop (LDW), supported by **Merck**. The two-day workshop aims to prepare the next generation of leaders for the specific demands of cancer center operations. In 2027, AACI will launch its Leadership Advancement Program, a yearlong, hybrid learning opportunity for past LDW participants.

Program and exhibit support for the conference is provided by **Advarra**, **Caris Life Sciences**, **Elevate Clinical Research Solutions**, **Flatiron**, **Foundation Medicine**, **Gilead**, **InfoReady**, **Merck**, **Natera**, **Naur Inc.**, **Paradigm Health**, **Triomics**, **VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center**, **Vizlitics**, **WCG**, and **Yunu**.

Opportunities for media coverage, including interviews, photos, and video, will be available throughout the meeting.

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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.