

A Stitch in Time to Save Lives

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When United States President Joseph R. Biden introduced the relaunch of the Cancer Moonshot Initiative in 2022, NCCN was among many leading cancer organisations to strongly advocate for the new focus on increasing cancer screening and prevention. Much more needs to be done in the U.S. and around the world to expand the use of life-saving cancer screening and detection tools such as mammograms, colonoscopies, pap smears, and low-dose CT scans.

There have been remarkable improvements made in cancer management in recent years; incredible achievements of research and innovation that continue to accelerate every day. In the U.S., the death rates for most cancer types have been going down steadily over the past 20 years or so, even as the number of new cases go up. But cancer mortality rates are still way too high worldwide. To truly reduce the devastating impact of the second leading cause of death globally—we need to look beyond new cures and do everything we can to enact equitable prevention and early detection.

The earlier the cancer is detected the more treatment options are available and the better chances for survival. Sometimes screening can even prevent cancer entirely by identifying abnormalities that can be treated before they develop into a cancer. However, too many people are not currently participating in screening on a recommended schedule, as determined by evidence-based expert consensus guidelines. This is due to many factors, including accessibility, public knowledge, and lingering impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of us, including healthcare professionals and the general public, should seek out trustworthy, vetted information on when and how to get screened. Care providers can help by making sure their patients are aware of recommended timing for when they should receive screenings and how they should be screened. Health centres can and should facilitate better screening access through flexible hours, versatile locations, and other accommodations to meet people where they are. Those in the life sciences industry can also do their part to share this important message.

It is particularly important that education and resources are directed to underserved communities in order to make sure evidence-based cancer preventive services are accessible to and accessed by people regardless of individual social or economic circumstances. There is a strong risk that scientific progress will lead to widening disparities in outcomes across race, ethnicity, region, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, and other factors—if equity is not considered at every step of the way. This shared social responsibility, added to personal responsibility, can save lives.

Dr Robert W. Carlson, Chief Executive Officer, National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN)