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# Commentary

## A Call for Engagement: AACI Cancer Centers and the National Cancer Plan

By Monica M. Bertagnolli, MD



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### Commentary Overview

To achieve President Biden's goal to reduce age-adjusted cancer mortality by 50 percent in 25 years, we must accelerate progress against the most common cancers and eliminate disparities in cancer outcomes.

The new National Cancer Plan, developed by National Cancer Institute (NCI), is designed to facilitate collaboration, communication, outreach and partnerships in the cancer research and care community.

The plan will help ensure alignment of the many ongoing and new initiatives underway at AACI cancer centers, to accelerate improved outcomes and enhance health equity.

**All disciplines involved in cancer research and care delivery share a common goal – to dramatically improve the lives of people with cancer and, ideally, prevent people from ever having to face the disease. President Biden has called for us to reduce age-adjusted cancer mortality by 50 percent in 25 years as a key benchmark toward that goal. Thanks to a recent analysis by National Cancer Institute (NCI) researchers published in *Cancer Discovery*, it is clear that we need to make faster progress against the most common cancers—and also achieve better results for people with all other cancers—to attain a 50 percent mortality reduction by 2047. Further, we must eliminate disparities that contribute to worse outcomes for some populations. I believe we can reach the day when all people live full and active lives, free from cancer’s harmful effects – but it clearly will take action from all of us to achieve this.**

As long-standing leaders of progress against cancer, U.S. cancer centers play a vital role in achieving these goals. Your institutions lead research programs that deliver new and better ways

to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer. You also provide the substantial training infrastructure required to empower a diverse research workforce equipped to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of scientific possibility.

## Expanding Access

For cancer control and treatment, our nation looks to cancer centers as a resource to meet the needs of all people. In response to this, many of you extend your reach into communities that experience inequity with respect to a wide variety of social determinants of health. Your work in these communities informs national research and treatment priorities. As we develop new ways to meet the goals of the [Cancer Moonshot](#), we are committed to ensuring that anyone with cancer or at risk of cancer who wishes to participate in research has the opportunity to do so. We are also dedicated to achieving access to care—at all levels—for everyone in our country. This work presents a great challenge, but meeting it will yield tremendous benefits by creating a fairer, healthier society. AACI cancer centers can be at the forefront of realizing this vision.

Of course, despite the exceptional and important work you do, we all know that cancer is too great a challenge to solve alone and that no one organization or agency has all the resources required. Cancer centers are already stellar examples of the benefits of leveraging many sources of support. My questions to you: could you achieve even more through new collaborations – sharing resources and data, and aligning activities? Are there scientific questions or challenges faced by people in your catchment areas that you have been hoping to address, if only you had the right partners? Are there opportunities you have not yet considered that would allow your expertise and experience to advance the work of others? Could a fresh perspective reveal potential collaborations that have not occurred to you before?

## Facilitating Collaboration

Last month, NCI released a new [National Cancer Plan](#) to help everyone in the cancer research and care community focus on the work before us. It is, first and foremost, a tool designed to promote and facilitate collaborations that will end cancer as we know it.

As you look to elevate your cancer center's programs and expedite progress, you can use the plan as a framework to explore opportunities for crucial partnerships. We can begin with effective communication designed to liberate our information silos. For example, perhaps you are studying biomarkers to detect precancerous lesions, or running programs to promote tobacco cessation. By connecting programs like these to the plan's "prevent cancer" goal and sharing your successes and challenges with the community, we can begin to understand the range of activities underway and identify new opportunities to work with you for faster progress and greater impact.

Similarly, by viewing your center's major investments through the lens of the plan's eight goals, you might find that you would like to expand your outreach efforts to increase cancer screening rates but would need new training programs for community health workers to realize your vision. Or perhaps one of your basic science teams has identified a new downstream signaling pathway that may drive tumor treatment resistance, but you lack a sufficient number of treated patients and outcome results to define the clinical relevance of this result.

## Monitoring Progress, Identifying Gaps, and Breaking Down Barriers

As you incorporate the National Cancer Plan into your efforts, we ask that you keep us informed of your activities to contribute to its goals – both those that are new and ones already underway. With help from the members of the President's Cancer Panel, we will monitor progress, identify gaps, and break down barriers to collaboration so that we can best support and amplify your work. So, stay tuned – we will soon provide you with efficient ways to communicate your contributions.

At NCI, we look to the nation's cancer centers and AACI as essential partners in our mission to end cancer as we know it for all people. There is so much being done by your many dedicated and caring members who work at a national level and within local communities. We can reach our potential for accelerated progress—and achieve a sum that is greater than our parts—if we align our actions and work together to break through the scientific and systemic barriers in our way. I look forward to working with you at this exciting time!

## Our Mission

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents 108 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in the United States and Canada. AACI is accelerating progress against cancer by empowering North America's leading cancer centers in their shared mission to alleviate suffering.

## About AACI Commentary

To promote the work of its members, AACI publishes *Commentary*, a monthly editorial series focusing on major issues of common interest to North American cancer centers, authored by cancer center leaders and subject matter experts.



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