



## **STUDY FINDS STATES MISS KEY OPPORTUNITIES TO REDUCE CANCER RATES**

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**WASHINGTON, September 24, 2003** – A report released today by Trust for America's Health (TFAH) found that states are missing key opportunities to reduce cancer rates. While most state health agencies maintain high-quality information about cancer rates, if states increased efforts to connect existing cancer tracking data with other sources of health information, they could identify more potential causes of cancer and save more lives.

The report, "Improving Cancer Tracking Today Saves Lives Tomorrow: Do States Make the Grade?" examined how well 35 states track and use information about cancer rates. Twelve states received As, 15 states and the District of Columbia received Bs, three states received Cs, three states received Ds, and one state received an F. Alabama, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Tennessee and Virginia were among the worst performers, while California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Washington and Wyoming were among the best.

Although most states received high marks for their collection of data, the findings demonstrate that most states do not adequately incorporate occupational, environmental, and behavioral studies with current cancer-rate data. Linking this information would allow public health officials to modify cancer prevention efforts and target at-risk populations for which intervention would be beneficial. A more comprehensive approach could also better address community questions about possible cancer clusters and differences in the rates of cancer based on geography and ethnicity.

"Knowledge is power. In this case, what we don't know can kill us. Improved use of cancer tracking information can give us the power to prevent disease and save lives," said Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, executive director of TFAH. "This report tells a story of missed opportunities. States can and should do better when it comes to tracking cancer and using that knowledge to win the war on cancer."

The TFAH study recommends:

- Providing additional funding to expand data linkages for cancer tracking;
- Making community-level cancer data more available to the public and to researchers while protecting patient confidentiality;

- Encouraging state public health departments to achieve real-time reporting for childhood cancers to contribute to time-sensitive cancer treatments and research activities;
- Strengthening public accountability and enforcing performance standards of cancer registry programs;
- Conducting a thorough review of the existing fragmented cancer registry system through the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that more than half a million people will die of cancer in the U.S. this year. Beyond the devastating human cost, cancer also costs our nation more than \$180 billion in health care spending and lost productivity from illness and death. ACS also estimates that one-third of cancer deaths could be prevented.

Cancer tracking has been at the forefront of efforts to track chronic diseases, which account for seven out of 10 deaths in the U.S. Currently, there is no nationwide health tracking network, which essential to understanding and preventing the full range of health threats Americans face today, from cancer to chemical terrorism to West Nile virus.

The report was supported by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It is available on TFAH's Web site at [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).

*Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.*