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**Statement by Dr. Shelley Hearne, DrPH
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On Today's Disturbing Report by the National Cancer Institute**

Today's disturbing report by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) shows we've been working in the dark when it comes to cancer, Americans' #1 health concern. Such concerns are entirely appropriate given our nation's poor track record in preventing disease. The new study shows rates of cancer have been rising, and we didn't know it. That's why we need a nationwide health tracking network to track where and when cancer is striking and its potential links to factors in the environment.

The discovery that several common forms of cancer are rising -- not declining or leveling off as previously thought -- reveals serious shortcomings in the way this country keeps track of cancer and other chronic diseases. A nationwide health tracking network that would systematically track cancer, asthma, birth defects and Parkinson's, as well as other illnesses, and their relationship to environmental factors would give communities information they have the right to know and help health officials prevent future deaths and illnesses.

The NCI's SEER (Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results) Program, which compiles the state and local data cited in today's study, and the cancer registries in most states, provide health officials and researchers with more information than we have on most chronic diseases. But this is not nearly enough to begin to prevent these illnesses. As this new study indicates, the SEER Program does not obtain data in a timely fashion, which results in a serious under-counting of cancer cases. It is collected in only a handful of states. And it isn't linked to other databases that might shed light on the possible causes of these cases.

Most people are shocked to learn that the United States has no nationwide, comprehensive system for monitoring these chronic diseases and their potential links to environmental factors. If we don't look for that information, we're not going to find it, and opportunities to prevent millions of deaths and illnesses will be missed.

Early next year, Trust for America's Health will release a report grading each state on its efforts to track and prevent cancer. With this state-by-state report card, we will evaluate the current registries and recommend expanding on these current efforts so we have a nationwide health tracking network for cancer and other diseases.

Across the country, many communities and families are afraid of rising cancer rates and possible cancer clusters. Today's study fuels that concern, and public health officials and Congress should do something about it by supporting a nationwide health tracking network.

The new NCI study, published today in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, is online at <http://jncicancerspectrum.oupjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/jnci;94/20/1537>.

For more information on the proposal for a Nationwide Health-Tracking Network, please visit the Trust for America's Health Web site at www.healthyamericans.org, or call Dale Curtis at 202-777-3530.

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