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Arizona Has the Lowest Cancer Rates in the U.S *But Many People are Diagnosed Too Late to Survive*

Good news for Arizonans! Findings from a report by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) determined that Arizona's cancer incidence rates are the lowest in the nation. According to the United States Cancer Statistics (USCS) Incidence and Mortality Web-based Report (which compares the rates of cancer across 49 states, six metropolitan areas and the District of Columbia) Arizona ranks 50th and 49th in key categories.

“This is a case where being last, means you are doing well,” said Wayne Tormala, Chief, Arizona Department of Health Services Bureau of Tobacco & Chronic Disease. “Being 50th means our rates are the lowest.”

Arizona has the lowest incidence of all cancers combined among men and women, the lowest rate of cancers among men, and the second lowest rate of all cancers among women.

Although Arizona can boast about its low cancer rates, it's not all good news. According to the Arizona Cancer Registry, more people in Arizona are diagnosed with cancer at later stages.

“This truly makes the case for early detection and screening,” said Sharlene Bozack, Chief Government Relations Officer, American Cancer Society (ACS) Cancer Action Network Great West Division. “The earlier some cancers are found – like breast cancer, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer – the more likely people are to survive those cancers.”

ACS has a strong focus on getting Arizonans screened, early and regularly. Its screening guidelines recommend:

- yearly mammograms for women starting at age 40
- a prostate exam (PSA) every 1-2 years for men over age 45, dependent upon personal risk factors
- a colonoscopy every 10 years for men and women over age 50

Unfortunately, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 60 percent of Arizona women did not have the recommended mammogram last year; 44 percent of men did not get their PSA test in the past two years, and 42 percent of adults over the age of 50 report they have never had a colonoscopy.

Although Arizona's ranking among other states is impressive, cancer is a serious threat to Arizonans since more people in Arizona are diagnosed with cancer at later stages. This year alone, one in three colorectal cancers discovered will be fatal. While half of breast cancers are discovered early enough for treatment to be effective, for one of every two women in Arizona, the diagnosis will be at a later stage. That means, in 2011 more than 1,000 women will die when their breast cancer is discovered too late.

“Many factors affect whether people go for screenings,” added Tormala. “The economy may have an impact on early diagnosis as lost jobs means lost insurance, and that leads to potentially more advanced-stages of cancers in our state, calling for a heightened urgency for early prevention and education.”

“Next to prevention and intervention, well-founded data is a critical first step in addressing cancer in our state,” said Tormala. “We are currently discussing with cancer experts nationally and from throughout our state how to address the challenge of increasing early detection and disease management.”

Equally critical is hearing from people first-hand, which is why the Arizona Department of Health Services Bureau of Tobacco and Chronic Disease has set up a survey link at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/HBLPWRF> to glean information from the public.

The link, starting today, will be open until April 29, 2011. The public is invited to comment on what can be done about early detection and screening in Arizona. This public comment will contribute to the development of initiatives for inclusion in the Arizona Cancer Control Plan and be utilized in future grant making. For more information about the program, and the Arizona Cancer Control Coalition (AzCCC), please visit <http://azcancercontrol.gov>.

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About The American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide community-based voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives and diminishing suffering from cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. The American Cancer Society Great West Division is located on 4550 E. Bell Road, Phoenix, Arizona.

About the Arizona Comprehensive Cancer Control Program

Comprehensive Cancer Control is a collaborative process through which a community combines resources to reduce the cancer burden by working together to achieve risk reduction, early detection, better treatment and enhanced survivorship. The Arizona Cancer Coalition consists of volunteer committees dedicated to moving the state forward in accomplishing cancer-specific and related goals and objectives as outlined in the Arizona Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan.

About Wayne Tormala

Dedicating his entire career to human service, Wayne has provided leadership at the local, national and global levels in programs addressing issues of public health, mental illness, the environment, world hunger, poverty, and economic justice. Currently, he is the Bureau Chief for the Bureau of Tobacco and Chronic Disease at the Arizona Department of Health Services where he oversees all aspects of tobacco prevention/cessation programming and the prevention/management of chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, lung disease, stroke, asthma, and lung disease.

About Sharlene Bozack

Sharlene was very active in the strategic planning for both Arizona and Nevada Smoke Free initiatives that were successfully passed on Election Day November 7, 2006 and in 2007. She also worked with her Alaska staff to keep Anchorage Smoke Free. In August 2008, she became the Chief Government Relations Officer for the Great West Division American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network.