

**STRATEGIC  
OBJECTIVE**

**8**

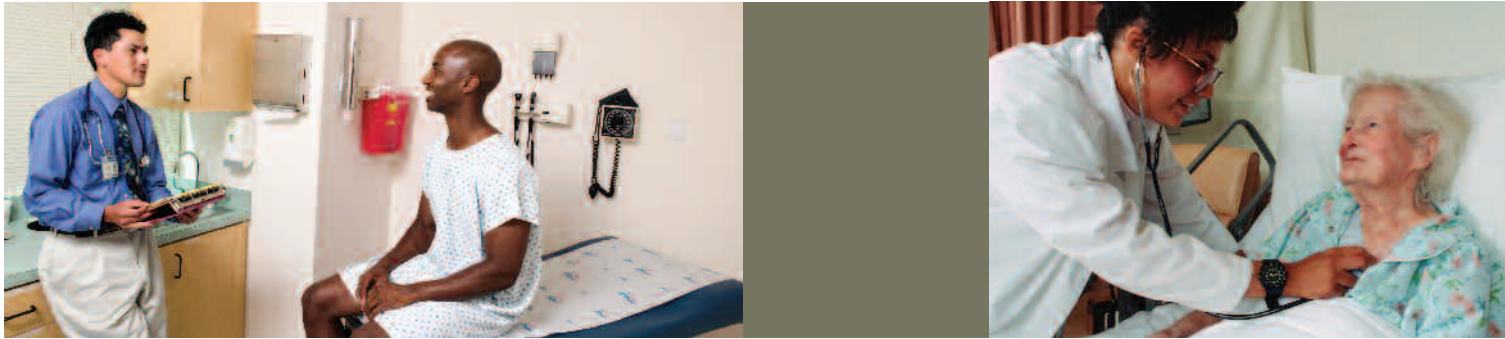
## **Overcome Cancer Health Disparities**

**We will study and identify factors contributing to disparities, develop culturally appropriate approaches, and disseminate interventions to overcome those disparities across the cancer control continuum from disease prevention to end-of-life care.**

Overcoming cancer health disparities is one of the best opportunities we have for eliminating the suffering and death due to cancer. Addressing the needs of the medically underserved is a critical component of each of our NCI strategic objectives. Significant progress has been made over the past three decades in understanding, preventing, detecting, diagnosing, and treating cancer and in improving the quality of cancer survivorship and end-of-life care. Sadly, not all Americans are reaping the benefits of this progress.

Because cancer initiation and progression are determined by complex interactions among genetic, behavioral, cultural, social, and environmental factors, some level of health disparity—e.g., higher than average incidence, more rapid disease progression, poorer outcome or survival—can affect anyone. However, several assessments conducted in recent years point to the unequal burden of disease in our society as not just a scientific and medical challenge but also a moral and ethical dilemma for our Nation. Minorities and other underserved populations variously distinguished by race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, geographic location, occupation, and education bear a far greater cancer burden than the general population.

NCI must take the lead in accelerating the dissemination and implementation of interventions to address cancer health disparities. We must establish collaborations and partnerships with public, private, and community organizations to address inequities. We must work more efficiently and effectively with current partners, evaluate the impact of our efforts, and broaden our bases of collaboration. This kind of resource integration provides our best hope of overcoming cancer health disparities.



**STRATEGY 8.1**—Understand the factors that cause cancer health disparities.

A first step in eliminating disparities in cancer incidence, treatment, and survival is to understand their underlying causes and contributing factors. NCI will:

- > Assemble interdisciplinary teams of scientists and practitioners to further elucidate the complex interplay of social, behavioral, environmental, genetic, public health, and economic factors, as well as political and health system forces, that may contribute to disparities.
- > Advance research to identify and investigate race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and how they influence trends and rates of cancer incidence and mortality.
- > Support efforts to disaggregate large population studies in order to identify geographic areas of high cancer mortality and investigate the complex mechanisms that underlie the disparities identified across various age groups and stages of cancer.

New knowledge in these areas will support continued work with other government, academic, and private organizations to develop effective and appropriate interventions.

**STRATEGY 8.2**—Work with communities to develop interventions targeted to the specific needs of underserved populations.

Community-based programs like the Community Networks to Reduce Cancer Disparities, the Minority-Based Clinical Oncology Program, NCI-supported Cancer Centers, and other academic centers located in underserved areas are ideal venues for designing and testing interventions. By understanding the health experience of these communities, researchers are able to develop more culturally appropriate and accessible interventions, healthcare providers are more likely to arrange for their patients to participate in cutting-edge clinical research, and cancer patients and people at risk have access to the full range of state-of-the-art cancer services. NCI will:

- > Work with community members, leaders, and healthcare providers to implement clinical, correlative, and community research for populations known to bear heavy burdens of cancer and work to ensure broader community participation in clinical trials for patients and healthcare providers.
- > Foster the participation of community and academic partners to facilitate the development of education, research, and training programs that will increase access to and use of cancer prevention interventions such as smoking cessation, healthy eating and physical activity and the early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer.

These activities will help to build sustainable alliances with local communities.

**Community-Based Research Is Vital for Understanding Health Disparities**

Given the complex determinants of health status, the disproportionate burden of disease, and the limited effectiveness of traditional research methods, particularly within underserved communities, more comprehensive and participatory approaches to public health research and practice are essential. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a collaborative approach that equitably involves academic, public health, and community partners in the research process. By combining the unique strengths of individuals and groups, CBPR aims to undertake research of importance to the community, with the goal of achieving social change.

**STRATEGY 8.3**— Provide the knowledge base for and develop interventions to enhance the integration of cancer services for underserved populations.

Despite new technological advances in diagnostic and therapeutic interventions, the complex interplay among behavioral, social, and environmental factors continues to undermine access to cancer services and widen the gap in healthcare disparities. This problem is coupled with escalating healthcare costs and the high numbers of uninsured and underinsured people. Under these conditions, healthcare providers must sometimes make difficult treatment decisions and underserved patient populations are less likely to have access to new advances in cancer prevention, diagnosis, and therapy. To counter this disparity, NCI will:

- > Conduct research to discover the most effective ways to address critical gaps in access to care by supporting patient navigator program development and the replication of effective models.
- > Determine the best ways to provide culturally appropriate care, taking into account socioeconomic, comorbidities, diagnostic and treatment interventions, survivorship, and end-of-life needs.
- > Conduct community-based research to develop strategies for increasing trust and encouraging participation in cancer research.
- > Promote an interdisciplinary team approach to accelerate the integration of cancer healthcare services.

These efforts will expand the participation of underserved populations in the Nation's cancer research enterprise and the availability and delivery of associated discoveries.

**Patient Navigator Programs Are Key to Cancer Care Integration**

“Patient navigation” in cancer care refers to the assistance offered to patients, survivors, families, and caregivers to help them access and chart a course through the healthcare system. Navigators are experienced lay people, social workers, nurses, and others from local communities who are able to communicate credibly with patients. They work with vulnerable or disadvantaged people to help them obtain accurate information on diagnosis and treatment procedures, access to hospitals and clinics, guidance on financial assistance, and help with tracking their records and obtaining prescriptions. In some cases they also arrange for language translation, travel, social support, or religious counseling.

**STRATEGY 8.4**—Work with others to develop a cadre of researchers and clinicians prepared to effectively address cancer health disparities.

The success of research designed to reduce the disproportionate burden of cancer incidence and mortality in underserved populations will depend on increasing the number of culturally sensitive, well trained investigators. NCI will:

- > Support introductory science experiences for minority high school students, individual and institutional fellowships and other college level training programs, career development awards, mentored research fellowships for postdoctoral and junior investigators, and the cross training of non-minority researchers.
- > Work with schools of public health, social work, health administration, and medicine to promote health disparities communication and outreach efforts and encourage students to consider health disparities research as a career.
- > Support NCI-designated Cancer Centers and Minority-Serving Institutions conducting joint research, training, education, and outreach programs with particular focus on the disproportionate incidence, morbidity, and mortality of cancer in underrepresented minority populations.
- > Support studies to understand cultural and behavioral factors that affect the conduct of research and how cancer care is provided and ensure that new insights are used to guide research and inform practice.
- > Collaborate with Cancer Centers and grantee institutions to promote training on cancer health disparities issues for healthcare providers and scientists.

A better prepared cadre of researchers and clinicians will help to address the unrecognized and unintentional biases that impede quality cancer care.

**STRATEGY 8.5**—Develop and work with others to implement innovative, educationally and culturally appropriate approaches for disseminating information on research results to underserved populations.

Communication, outreach, and information dissemination with underserved populations requires innovative approaches and community involvement. NCI will:

- > Use knowledge gained from health literacy and risk perception research to develop and implement plans for disseminating new interventions and relevant scientific information.

- > Ensure that NCI publications and other communications tools are reviewed for cultural appropriateness and adapted as needed.
- > Ensure comprehensive coverage of NCI publications in communications targeted to underserved populations.
- > Team with health disparity experts, cancer advocacy groups, and cancer education specialists to disseminate consistent, current, and accurate information.
- > Partner with the minority and national media to reach their constituents with timely and accurate health messages.
- > Support public workshops and focused dissemination efforts to address the many needs related to health disparities.

Partnerships between NCI and other public, private, and non-traditional organizations will increasingly improve NCI's communication, outreach, and dissemination efforts.

### **NCI's Cancer Information Service Partners to Reach the Underserved**

The NCI Cancer Information Service (CIS) is a national resource for information and education about cancer and a leader in translating cancer information into language the public can easily understand. Through its Partnership Program, the CIS reaches the medically underserved, including minority groups and people with limited access to health information and services throughout the United States and its territories.

CIS works with other agencies and organizations that have an established presence in the state or region and are trusted within their communities. In 2004, the CIS collaborated with over 100 partners to reach underserved African American populations with information and resources on breast and cervical cancer, clinical trials, tobacco control, and general cancer awareness. Working with others, the CIS is able to work across the country to reach those most in need with vital cancer information and services.



**STRATEGY 8.6**—Examine the role of health policy in reducing and eliminating cancer health disparities.

Strong evidence-based health policies can provide a critical link in helping to understand and overcome cancer health disparities. However, additional research is needed to understand factors affecting the development and implementation of health policies, their differential impact and unintended consequences, and

variations in their enforcement. NCI will identify gaps in our current knowledge and understanding, delineate areas in which further research is needed, and recommend effective policy strategies and programs for reducing cancer health disparities. NCI will:

- > Examine the interrelationships between cancer control policies and social, cultural, and environmental influences within specific populations.
- > Assess the cultural appropriateness of evidence-based policies as they apply to various population groups.
- > Examine the differential impact of policies on health systems, organizations, and institutions with multiple local, state, and national programs.
- > Build collaborations among researchers from diverse disciplines, academic settings, service delivery environments, and global communities to examine the issues of appropriateness, impact, translation, and dissemination of evidence-based health policies.
- > Support the dissemination and adoption of innovative approaches to policy issues concerning insurability and the challenges faced by the uninsured and underinsured.
- > Collaborate with U.S. and international stakeholders to identify the types of data and data training needed by decision makers to help influence policy.

These investments will improve the effectiveness of policy decisions aimed at reducing cancer risk and incidence, facilitating early cancer treatment, and increasing survival rates among those who suffer disproportionately from cancer.