



American Cancer Society  
Cancer Action Network  
825 Brook Street  
I-91 Tech Center  
Rocky Hill, CT. 06067  
(203)-379-4850  
[www.acscan.org](http://www.acscan.org)

**Appropriations Committee  
Health and Hospitals - Department of Public Health  
March 2, 2021**

**H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM  
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

**Re: Health and Hospitals - Department of Public Health – Prevention and Early Detection**

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR. ACS CAN is the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society that supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. In 2021 it is estimated that approximately 22,910 Connecticut residents will be diagnosed with cancer while 6,400 will die from the disease<sup>i</sup>.

Despite the challenges we face during the COVID-19 pandemic, cancer screening remains a public health priority, and we must provide the public with safe opportunities to prevent cancer or detect it early to improve patient outcomes. Screening disparities are already evident and, without deliberate focus, are likely to increase as a result of the pandemic. Efforts to promote screening and overcome barriers for populations with low screening prevalence must be at the forefront of our focus. Implementation of process and policy changes are urgently needed to sustain access to primary care and return screening to pre-pandemic rates.

**Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program**

ACS CAN applauds the Governor for funding, at \$2.193 million, the state Breast and Cervical Early Detection Program (BCCEDP).

The Affordable Care Act has helped to improve insurance coverage, raise awareness, and reduce the costs of breast and cervical cancer screenings for women, by requiring private insurers, Medicare, and Medicaid expansion programs to cover routine preventive services at no cost to the patient. However, millions of underinsured and uninsured women across the country still do not have access to these lifesaving screenings. Low-income women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other medically underserved groups often face later stage cancer diagnoses; have less access to diagnostic and treatment services; and lower survival rates.

The Connecticut Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program provides free pap tests to women aged 21 to 64 and mammograms to women 40 to 64 who are uninsured or underinsured and have income below 250% of the federal poverty line. These services include: routine breast and cervical cancer screenings and exams, patient navigation, care coordination, quality improvement and surveillance and monitoring of women with either a cancer diagnosis or abnormal test results, in an effort to detect cancers at its earliest stages when the chances for survival are the greatest.<sup>ii</sup>

Providing funding in FY '22 of \$2.193 million for the program will preserve a critical safety net for thousands of Connecticut women, who will continue to lack access to essential screening, diagnostic, and treatment services.

The need is clear-- breast and cervical cancers have alarming incidence and death rates for Connecticut residents but rates have been declining due to the availability of screening. Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in Connecticut and is the second leading cause of cancer death. Cancers that are found at an earlier stage are easier to treat and lead to greater survival.

The program is funded with 30% federal dollars and 70% state funding. Overall, according to the Department of Public Health, in FY '19: 4,314 women received 3,776 clinical breast exams, 2,570 mammograms, and 2,116 Pap tests with 1,615 HPV co-testing through BCEEDP funding. With program funding, 36 women were diagnosed with breast cancers and referred for treatment. Three women were diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer and an additional 35 women had precancerous cervical lesions removed before developing cervical cancer.

Once diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer many women are eligible for Medicaid coverage through the Cancer Treatment Act.

According to DPH, the 4,314 women screened represent 1.4% (4314/296259) of the target population ages for 21-64 to receive early detection and prevention services and 10.0% (4314/43108) of that population considered to be uninsured.

ACS CAN recognizes the enormous impact the Connecticut Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program has delivered in saving the lives of low-income, uninsured and underinsured women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer. The proven success of this early detection program demands funding levels that will provide access to these services for all eligible women. Maintaining state funding of \$2.193 million for FY '22 for breast and cervical cancer screenings for low income, uninsured or underinsured women through the program is vital so that no woman is denied these life-saving services.

#### **Human Papillomavirus Vaccine via Connecticut Vaccine Program**

ACS CAN strongly believes in preventing cancer before it develops and in detecting cancer early, when it is more easily treated. We support evidence-based, educational efforts to increase

uptake of the HPV vaccine and policies that will increase HPV vaccination rates, consistent with ACS's HPV Vaccination Guidelines, to prevent cervical and other HPV-related cancers.

HPV are a group of more than 150 related viruses and HPV infections are very common - nearly 80 million people in the US are currently infected with HPV<sup>iii</sup>. Each year, approximately 35,900 men and women are diagnosed with cancers caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV)<sup>iv</sup>. HPV causes almost all cervical cancers, 90 percent of anal cancers, and 60-70 percent of oropharyngeal, vaginal, vulvar, and penile cancers<sup>v</sup>.

Vaccines are available to help prevent infection by certain types of HPV and some of the cancers linked to those types. All HPV vaccines help prevent infection by HPV-16 and HPV-18. These 2 types cause about 70% of all cervical cancers and pre-cancers, as well as many cancers of the anus, penis, vulva, vagina, and throat<sup>vi</sup>. The HPV vaccine produces the strongest immune response in preteens. The American Cancer Society (ACS) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommend HPV vaccination for boys and girls starting at age 11 or 12, but the vaccination can be started as early as 9 years of age.

Since the first HPV vaccine was recommended in the US in 2006, prevalence of some types of HPV infections have declined by nearly 90 percent among teenage girls aged 14-19 and over 70 percent among women 20-24 years old<sup>vii</sup>. Despite the vaccine's ability to prevent most cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal, rectal, and oropharyngeal cancers, vaccination rates remain very low. Only 54.7 percent of girls and 51.6 percent of boys in Connecticut are fully vaccinated from HPV.

The HPV vaccine can prevent multiple types of cancer that will reduce Connecticut's cancer burden. The Governor's proposal to continue to make the vaccine available to all 11-12-year-old boys and girls through the Connecticut Vaccine Program will help increase vaccination uptake, ultimately reducing cancer incidence and mortality in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Bryte Johnson  
Connecticut Government Relations Director  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2021/cancer-facts-and-figures-2021.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.portal.ct.gov/DPH/Comprehensive-Cancer/Comprehensive-Cancer/The-Connecticut-Breast-and-Cervical-Cancer-Early-Detection-Program>

<sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Genital HPV infection – fact sheet. Updated May 19, 2016. Accessed June 2016. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm#a7>.

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Cancers Associated with Human Papillomavirus, United States—2012–2016*. USCS Data Brief, no 10. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Department of Health and Human Services; 2019.

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<sup>v</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The link between HPV and cancer. Updated September 30, 2015. Accessed June 2016.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html>.

<sup>vi</sup> American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2019*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2019.

<sup>vii</sup> Markowitz LE, Liu G, Hariri S, Steinau M, Dunne EF, Unger ER. Prevalence of HPV after introduction of the vaccination program in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2016; 137(2):e20151968.