

National Cancer Policy Forum Workshop on Cancer Screening



A recent **National Cancer Policy Forum** workshop on “**Advancing Progress in the Development and Implementation of Effective, High-quality Cancer Screening**” brought together researchers from academia, industry, cancer research organizations and foundations, and federal agencies including the NCI, CDC, and FDA to discuss strategies that may improve cancer screening uptake within the U.S. population. A major goal of this workshop was to identify opportunities to reduce cancer health disparities by increasing access to quality cancer screening and timely follow-up among underserved populations.

Among the barriers to equitable cancer screening for underserved populations identified by the workshop participants were lack of access to health care due to factors such as hospital closures, living in remote rural areas, lack of insurance, and inability to afford care because of high deductibles; the presence of other co-existing health issues that prevent individuals from

seeking cancer screening; mistrust of the health care system; and disabilities. Barriers to timely follow-up of abnormal screening results included many of the same patient-related factors that pose barriers to screening, as well as clinical and/or organizational factors such as lack of awareness of abnormal screening results among physicians, lack of effective communication between health care providers and patients, and scheduling and other logistical challenges.

Addressing these challenges will require a better understanding of population-specific barriers from both patient and provider perspectives, followed by the development of evidence-based interventions. Potential steps to mitigate these challenges include enhancing existing public health programs such as those implemented by the CDC and FDA; a greater focus on rural health with utilization of new systems such as telemedicine and digital technologies; better use of electronic health records; and reinforcement of resources available at community health clinics. Continued research is also needed to identify ways to improve shared decision making for cancer screening, including the use of decision aids that may enhance patient knowledge about the potential risks and benefits of the tests and thereby actively engage patients in their health care.