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## **Montana Falls Behind Enacting Cancer-Fighting Public Policies**

**Big Sky Country Not Following Recommended Policies Proven to Successfully Reduce Cancer Rates**

**Urgent Attention Needed to Ensure Cancer Patients Regain Access to Pain Medication**

Helena, Mont. – August 9, 2018 – Montana slipped a grade in meeting cancer-fighting best practice policies as recommended by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). According to the latest edition of ACS CAN’s *How Do You Measure Up?: A Progress Report on State Legislative Activity to Reduce Cancer Incidence and Mortality*, Montana measured up to policy recommendations in only three of the nine issue areas ranked.

This year’s report also highlights a troubling trend regarding access to pain medication for cancer patients and survivors. In 2018, there have been more than 470 state legislative proposals introduced across the country proposals introduced related to pain management and opioid issues nationwide. In contrast, in 2015 there were fewer than 80 state legislative proposals introduced regarding these same issues. Well-intended actions in many states to curb opioid abuse is inadvertently cutting access to pain management for cancer patients and survivors.

The *How Do You Measure Up?* report includes a special section on the impact of pain policy and evaluates whether Montana is implementing balanced pain policies. Specifically, the report takes a deep dive into how states can reduce opioid abuse while ensuring patients who legitimately need these drugs maintain access to them.

Many cancer patients and survivors need pain medication to live and complete even the most basic day-to-day tasks—but across the country, the wave of state legislation meant to address opioid abuse has had unintended consequences, making it harder for people with cancer or chronic diseases to access legitimate pain care. In Montana, cancer patients and survivors have faced significant barriers when attempting to access their prescribed pain treatments because of recent policies enacted that are aimed at combatting the opioid epidemic.

“While our state is experiencing a public health crisis due to the abuse and diversion of prescription drugs, it is critically important to remember that there are also thousands of law-abiding Montanans who are cancer patients and survivors that rely on the legitimate and legal use of these prescription drugs, including opioids, to get through their day or night,” said ACS CAN Montana Government Relations Director Kristin Page-Nei. “We should not make it unduly difficult for these individuals to access their needed medications and we certainly should not be making them out to be criminals.”

Despite medical breakthroughs, one in three Montanans will get cancer sometime in their lifetime. The *How Do You Measure Up?* report rates states in nine specific areas of public policy that can help fight cancer, including increased access to care through Medicaid, funding for cancer screening programs, smoke-free laws, cigarette tax levels, funding for tobacco prevention and cessation programs, cessation coverage under Medicaid and prohibiting minors from using indoor tanning devices. The report also looks at whether a state provides a balanced approach to pain medication and if it has passed policies proven to increase patient quality of life.

A color-coded system classifies how well a state is doing in each issue. Green shows that a state has adopted evidence-based policies and best practices; yellow indicates moderate movement toward the benchmark and red shows where states are falling short.

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## How Montana Measures Up:

### Cigarette Tax Rates

Smoke-free Laws

Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program Funding

Medicaid Coverage of Tobacco Cessation Services

Indoor Tanning Device Use Restrictions

Increased Access to Medicaid

### Pain Policy

Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program Funding

Access to Palliative Care

**Yellow (green in previous years)**

Green

Yellow

Yellow

Red

Green

**Red (yellow in previous years)**

Red

Green

“We owe it to Montanan cancer patients and everyone at risk of developing the disease to do what we know works to prevent cancer and improve access to screenings and treatment,” said Page-Nei. “Another way Montana can get the cancer-fight back on track is if voters pass Initiative-185 to raise the state tobacco tax this November. It would reduce cancer risks by motivating adults who smoke to quit and keep kids from ever smoking.”

In Montana, more than 28 percent of cancer deaths are caused by smoking. I-185, also known as the *Healthy Montana Initiative*, would prevent an estimated 8,000 Montana kids from smoking, which would amount to youth smoking rates dropping more than 20 percent. Currently, tobacco-related diseases cost Montana taxpayers more than \$81 million per year in increased Medicaid costs alone. Revenue generated by I-185 would:

- Prevent the loss of Medicaid coverage for 100,000 Montanans including veterans and working families.
- Directly fund important veterans’ programs, such as suicide prevention, and fund services that help seniors and people with disabilities stay in their homes.
- Support rural hospitals and clinics to ensure that they remain open for all Montanans.
- Fund smoking prevention and cessation programs, to help motivate adults who smoke to quit, and keep kids from starting to smoke.

ACS CAN supports the Healthy Montana I-185. Learn more at [www.healthymontana.org](http://www.healthymontana.org)

To view the complete report and details on Montana grades, visit [www.acscan.org/measure](http://www.acscan.org/measure).

ACS CAN, the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard. For more information, visit [www.acscan.org](http://www.acscan.org).

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