



February 9, 2021

Dear Attorney General Becerra and Dr. Lander,

As leaders of the philanthropic and oncology community, we would like to warmly congratulate you on your forthcoming roles as members of President Biden's cabinet. We are thrilled to have an administration that is committed to science along with the health and well-being of all Americans.

During his long career as a public servant, President Biden has shown an unrivaled commitment to accelerating progress in cancer diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Now that he has assumed the highest office in the land, we write to you as a group of concerned cancer research leaders to warn that progress in the fight against cancer will be stunted for a generation unless swift action is taken.

The situation is grave. As an op-ed last month in the *New York Daily News* by the Mark Foundation for Cancer Research's CEO Michele Cleary laid out, numerous devastating impacts to cancer care and research have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic ("[Don't sacrifice cancer care to COVID](#)," January 13). Treatments have been delayed (which can be a death sentence for cancer patients) and groundbreaking research has been pushed back years, as labs try to restart hobbled experiments, and talented young investigators ponder other career options in the face of hiring freezes at U.S. research institutions.

Those of us who have dedicated our lives to advancing pioneering cancer research have already started the conversation on the multiple steps that need to be taken to ensure that cancer patients today and in the future get access to timely and effective treatments as well as benefit from the exciting and promising innovations that our research community has produced or was poised to produce before the pandemic crippled us all one year ago. Some of those steps are laid out in a second op-ed by Dr. Cleary in *The Hill* ("[Biden shouldn't let defeating cancer take a backseat to COVID](#)," January 23), including:

- Government and philanthropic funders of cancer research must align to provide more flexibility in awarding and managing grants with respect to deadlines and termination dates, as well as to offer extended and new funding mechanisms that empower investigators to overcome delays caused by hampered access to labs since March 2020.
- Stringent requirements for extensive preliminary data in upcoming grant applications, which would be impossible to produce in this environment, should be temporarily eased.
- To preserve the high caliber of academic research that the U.S. is known for, proactive programs for sustaining our current and future scientific talent pipeline that clear barriers and earmark funding need to be established so to incentivize and recruit the most innovative thinkers in the U.S. and across the globe as well as empower postdoctoral investigators who have been stuck in limbo due to visa issues and halted job searches.

- Formal partnerships and incentives for biopharma companies to more vigorously invest in earlier stage, higher risk research and fast-track emerging academic diagnostic and drug development efforts that have experienced setbacks need to be created.

We must act now on these mandates and others, but we will only be successful if our conversation is heard and embraced by the scientific advisors of the new administration. We implore you to immediately convene a task force on cancer care and research so that the recommendations above can be expanded upon and implemented. And we raise our hands to be a significant part of that endeavor.

A full accounting of the destruction that has already taken place won't be known for some time. According to [data released last month](#) by the American Cancer Society, nearly 2 million new cancer cases and over 600,000 cancer deaths would be projected to occur in 2021 without accounting for the disproportionately negative outcomes COVID-19 is having on cancer diagnoses and outcomes. Because of COVID-19, these numbers will be substantially worse than predicted, potentially reversing the steady decline in cancer mortality that has occurred since the early 1990s. That's why we must act now.

We know the challenges facing our country are enormous. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every American deeply and has taken the lives of over 450,000 of our fellow citizens. We are thankful that successful commercial advancement of academic science has brought to the fore vaccines that will enable us to eventually put the pandemic in the rear-view mirror.

When that hopeful moment arrives, let's make sure we don't face a crisis in cancer. Together, we can stop it from happening.

Sincerely,

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