

Using Online Mass Media to Educate Nevada's Lawmakers About Cancer Control Policy

BACKGROUND

The Nevada Cancer Coalition (NCC) is a leader in comprehensive cancer control and works with stakeholders to implement policy, systems, and environmental changes to improve the health of Nevadans. Policy based changes can affect laws and regulations that can transform public health and healthcare at several levels, and "have the greatest potential to impact disease burden," (Moore, et al 2019).

Nevada is estimated to have 16,390 new cases of cancer diagnosed in 2022 and 5,730 people are expected to die of the disease (ACS, 2022). Policy decisions, including the state's investment in Medicaid expansion along with federal support for ongoing breast and cervical cancer screening programs, have likely played a role in increasing the number of Nevadans screened for these cancers. Yet Nevada remains below the national average for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screening.

The Nevada Legislature meets once every two years, with the exception of special sessions. A biennial legislative session hosted in a more rural capital city is also said to "empower the 1,000-plus members of the legislative lobbying corps who enjoy unfettered access to legislators for the four months that the Nevada Legislature is in session, largely because of the remoteness of the state capital and the resulting limited citizen participation in the legislative process" (Damore, 2019).

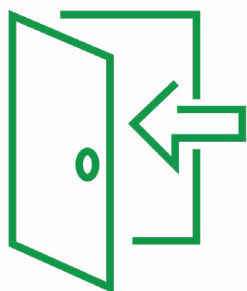


While this lengthy time between sessions allows for some proposed policies to be further studied and refined, it also lengthens the time it takes to make changes addressing complex problems, such as cancer, and keep the state up to date with policy changes at the federal level.

The Nevada Legislature, and to a lesser degree city and county governments, have passed laws and ordinances that favor cancer control efforts, such as smoke-free policies or policies for sunscreen in schools. However, many policy opportunities have not been pursued. In other instances, policies have been adopted that take up a popular cause, but without using evidence-based best practices and implementation, such as laws for dense breast tissue, these policies have had little to no effect.

CHALLENGE:

NCC has limited ability to advocate for cancer control policy because of rules placed upon much of the organization's funding – provided through state and federal grants.



OPPORTUNITY:

The release of the Biden Administration's Cancer Moonshot reboot in February 2022 provided a jumping off point to educate lawmakers on the importance of cancer control policy. It was released at precisely the right time: midpoint between biennial sessions and prior to legislators beginning the bill draft request process.

What advocacy is pursued must be efficient and effective.

ACTIVITY

NCC determined the most efficient method of sharing a list of policy priorities and reaching a larger swath of Nevadans – policymakers as well as their constituents – was to submit an opinion article to a statewide policy-focused news outlet. An opinion article was crafted using the latest data and examples of how failing to implement strong policy can have negative consequences. Seven policy recommendations were provided covering a variety of areas that would impact cancer prevention efforts, and support more robust early detection, treatment and survivorship care.

The article was submitted to Nevada Current, a nonprofit, policy-focused online news source based in Nevada, and ran February 21, 2022. NCC included the top third of the article on its own blog, linking back to the published opinion, and shared it in a monthly email to its nearly 400 members. Having the opinion article published gave the article greater weight than had it merely been an NCC blog post, and thus it was more likely to be shared and seen.

1 OPINION ARTICLE
PUBLISHED

7 POLICY PRIORITIES
RECOMMENDED



REPUBLISHED ON NCC
BLOG & NEWSLETTER

SHARED WITH KEY
REGIONAL PARTNERS

PARTICIPATED IN POLICY
ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S.
CABINET MEMBER

CREATED OPPORTUNITY
TO BUILD STRONGER
REGIONAL ALLIANCES

OUTCOME

With just a handful of months having passed since the opinion article was published, it's too soon to tell how much impact it will have on cancer control and public health policy in Nevada. However, it has already had positive effects. NCC's executive director was invited to participate in a public health policy discussion with the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Xavier Becerra. That opportunity provided a direct connection to Becerra's western U.S. staff, who have requested updates on Nevada's policy efforts, and showed support for the policy recommendations noted in the article.

Additionally, partners from throughout the region, including Huntsman Institute for Cancer, shared the article with key leaders within their organizations. NCC sees this as an opportunity to build stronger alliances with more regional partners who may be able to coalesce in support of cancer control policies during the 2023 Nevada Legislative Session.

Citations:

American Cancer Society (2022). Cancer Statistics Center. <https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/#!/state/Nevada>

Damore, D. (June 2019). "Limits on Nevada's legislature keep it from serving the state." Brookings, accessed May 23, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/06/14/limits-on-nevadas-legislature-keep-it-from-serving-the-state/>

Moore, A., Villalobos, A., Gardner, A. L., Staples, C., & Shafir, S. (2019). Leveraging the strength of comprehensive cancer control coalitions to support policy, systems, and environmental change. *Cancer causes & control: CCC*, 30(10), 1033–1044. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10552-019-01215-w>