



Statement of Heather Ciccarelli, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network Volunteer and
American Cancer Society Patient Resource Navigator at the Maine Medical Center Cancer Institute
Cover Maine Now! Press Event
March 21, 2013

Good morning.

My name is Heather Ciccarelli and I am a volunteer for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and an American Cancer Society Patient Resource Navigator at the Maine Medical Center Cancer Institute.

I help people with a cancer diagnosis, family members and caregivers find the information, support and resources that may be helpful to them. The most frequent requests are related to paying for treatment, getting to treatment and seeking concrete resources related to daily living needs.

I am speaking today on behalf of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. The Cancer Action Network is the advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society and is proud to be a part of the Cover Maine Now! Coalition.

Accepting the federal dollars being offered to the state of Maine to increase access to health care coverage is critical to our efforts of eliminating cancer as a major health problem.

It is estimated that more than 9,100 new cases of cancer will be diagnosed and more than 3,200 Mainers will lose their fight against cancer in 2013, making it the leading cause of death in the state.

One in two men and one in three women are expected to be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime.

We can't fight cancer and the effects it has on thousands of lives every year unless everyone has access to quality, affordable health care. Providing hard-working, low-income Mainers access to affordable health care is one of the most effective ways to prevent and detect cancer early, treat cancer effectively and improve the quality of life for patients enduring cancer treatment.

Just by agreeing to accept federal dollars that are already available to Maine, we can provide health care coverage to nearly 70,000 Mainers.

That means they'll be able to see a doctor regularly and access preventive services, such as pap smears, mammograms and smoking cessation aids.

The evidence shows that people without health insurance are less likely to get recommended cancer screenings and are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at later stages, when it much more costly to treat and much less likely for the individual to survive.



Approximately 10 percent of cancer patients are uninsured at the time of diagnosis. Equally troubling, about one-third of cancer survivors report a loss of health insurance at some point in time since their diagnosis.

To me, it's not about the numbers, it is about the people. These are our mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, neighbors and grandparents.

I work with patients every day who are fighting for their lives. Instead of being able to focus on fighting cancer, they are worried about how they are going to pay their medical bills.

They are making decisions about their care based on what they can afford, instead of on what is best for their health. They are making decisions between paying their mortgage, buying food or getting cancer treatment.

Many are people who have worked hard their whole lives, but one diagnosis of cancer has made it impossible for them to continue to work. Cancer patients know firsthand that one diagnosis of a serious health condition can lead to poverty.

I was recently asked to call a gentleman living in a small town with a large mass causing him discomfort every day. He refused to be scheduled to see the surgeon because he had no money to pay for the visit. He had applied for Maine Care and was waiting for his application to be reviewed. I have another young man with advanced disease who had Maine Care but once he was approved for Social Security Disability became "over-income" and was no longer eligible. He still qualified for food stamps but no longer had Maine Care to pay for his medical care. Although he was able to get uncompensated care through the hospital he has no access to prescriptions or transportation. He was re-admitted to the hospital for an infection that could have been prevented with simple antibiotics. Unfortunately, the cost of the prescription prevented him from filling it.

Maine has the opportunity right now to make a decision that will allow more cancer patients to focus on fighting cancer. All Maine families deserve the security of quality health coverage to get lifesaving care when they need it.

Increased coverage is the gateway to reducing the cancer burden in Maine.

We strongly encourage policy makers in Maine to make the decision to cover more people and, in doing so, help thousands of people to live longer and healthier lives.