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OBESITY TOPS CANCER AS BIGGEST HEALTH CONCERN IN SURVEY OF PUGET SOUND-AREA ADULTS COMMISSIONED BY SEATTLE CANCER CARE ALLIANCE

SEATTLE – Puget Sound-area adults are much more knowledgeable about cancer than they were a decade ago. However, when asked to choose which health issue they feel is of most concern in the U.S. today and 10 years from now, respondents overwhelmingly chose obesity over cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's and aging. Those are some of the key results of a survey commissioned by Seattle Cancer Care Alliance.

The choice of obesity may have been a reflection of their struggles with weight. In response to personal questions about weight gain and loss, 56 percent said they had gained 10 pounds in the past decade versus 39 percent who reported losing 10 pounds in the same time period.

Obesity topped cancer by a greater than three-to-one margin as the biggest health issue of concern today (52 percent versus 15 percent) and by almost three to one as the biggest anticipated health issue 10 years from now (38 percent versus 13 percent).

"Obesity is linked to several important health problems, including diabetes, heart disease and joint problems, but I wonder how many people know that we have good evidence that it also puts people at risk for several cancers?" said Scott Ramsey, M.D., Ph.D., director of [SCCA's Cancer Prevention Clinic](#) and a member of the Public Health Sciences Division at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

"We believe that at least one third of all cancers could be prevented by adopting healthier lifestyles. We also know how hard it is to stop smoking, change our diet and get regular exercise," Ramsey said. "I think the survey shows that people recognize that changing health habits can help them and their families. As researchers and clinicians, our mission is to give them the tools to reach their goals."

The SCCA, which marked its 10th anniversary this year, commissioned GMA Research of Bellevue, Wash., to conduct the survey to assess changing attitudes and behaviors related to cancer

prevention, screening and treatment in the past decade. The survey also asked which health issues people thought would be most pressing 10 years from now. Six hundred adults in King, Snohomish, Pierce, Kitsap, Thurston, Whatcom and Island counties completed the online survey.

Most of the questions were designed to measure people's general awareness about cancer prevention. The majority of those surveyed answered in the affirmative when asked, compared to 10 years ago:

- Whether they were more knowledgeable about lifestyle factors that contribute to cancer risk
- Whether they themselves were living healthier lifestyles to prevent cancer and other chronic diseases
- Whether the public is better off in terms of the availability of cancer screening and treatment
- Whether more people are aware today that early diagnosis increases their chances of survival
- Whether men and women are more likely to be screened for prostate, colon and breast cancers.

The survey showed that cancer has touched many lives directly or indirectly: 45 percent indicated they or an immediate family member had been diagnosed with cancer in the past decade, while 72 percent reported they knew of friends, other relatives or co-workers who had been diagnosed with the disease.

Research studies by scientists at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, one of the three institutions that comprise the SCCA, consistently link diet and exercise to cancer prevention and reduction in incidence. For example:

- Obesity raises the risk of breast cancer after menopause, the time of life when breast cancer most often occurs. Increased physical activity, even when begun later in life, reduces overall breast-cancer risk by about 10 percent to 30 percent. And alcohol use is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer; women should limit intake to no more than one drink per day.
- Obese men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer have more than two-and-a-half times the risk of dying from the disease as compared to men of normal weight at the time of diagnosis.
- Obese men have an 80 percent higher risk of developing high-grade, aggressive prostate cancer. Studies have found a connection between greater consumption of dark green and cruciferous vegetables, especially broccoli and cauliflower, and decreased risk of aggressive prostate cancer.

For more information and research-based tips on exercise and physical activity, weight control, smoking cessation and more, please visit the Hutchinson Center's "[Resources for Healthy Living](http://www.fhrc.org/patient/healthyliving/resources.html)" page at <http://www.fhrc.org/patient/healthyliving/resources.html>

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About Seattle Cancer Care Alliance –Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) is a cancer treatment center that unites doctors from Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, UW Medicine and

Seattle Children's. Our goal, every day, is to turn cancer patients into cancer survivors. Our purpose is to lead the world in the prevention and treatment of cancer. SCCA has three clinical care sites: an outpatient clinic on the Hutchinson Center campus, a pediatric inpatient unit at Seattle Children's, and an adult inpatient unit at UW Medical Center. For more information about SCCA, visit www.seattlecca.org.

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