

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in South Carolina, exacting an enormous toll on the residents of our state. For seven different types of cancer, this 2010 Cancer Report Card compares the occurrence of cancer in South Carolina counties to the corresponding state and national Caucasian rates. Based on these comparisons, grades were assigned (see Methods and Key Resources, page 46). Cancers represented in the report card with limited data at the county level contain survival rates by stage at diagnosis. With this approach, there is not a single grade assigned for each cancer site, but the general trend seen in a review of the color-coded maps reveals an abundance of low and average grades (red and gray), and a paucity of high grades (blue). For many of the cancer sites, such as cancers of the breast, prostate, and colorectum, the grades for death rates are worse for Blacks than Whites, indicating important health disparities that need to be addressed. The overall average to poor grades suggest there is room for considerable improvement: the report card tells us that we are not yet achieving up to our potential. Black women have relatively low lung cancer death rates; a notable exception to the general pattern of lower rates in Whites and one that provides an example of the power of prevention, as this is the direct result of the low prevalence of smoking among women.

In order to address the significant problem that cancer poses to South Carolinians we must do more than assign grades. We must go on to take action to prevent cancer and to detect it in its early stages, when it is more curable. For this reason, the report card provides action steps that we can take as individual citizens. These action steps, based on solid scientific evidence, highlight key steps that South Carolinians need to take to reduce the burden of cancer in our state. These steps emphasize some key themes of the South Carolina Comprehensive Cancer Plan. Lifestyle factors, such as cigarette smoking, diet, and physical activity, are important contributors to cancer risk – accounting for well over half of the entire burden of cancer. The development of efficacious vaccines to prevent against infection with some cancer-causing strains of HPV is a major breakthrough in cancer prevention. For cancers with proven efficacious screening strategies, such as breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers, we need to facilitate and promote adherence to screening recommendations. The report card also provides specific action steps for key constituencies: legislators and those who oversee or provide care to cancer patients. For legislators, the recommendations largely focus on increasing access to cancer prevention (HPV vaccines) and early detection modalities, and passing legislation that will lead to reductions in cancers caused by cigarette smoking, such as increasing the cigarette tax and passing smoke-free workplace legislation. Concerted action on the part of us all is needed for us to achieve our desired goal for the next report card: straight A's.