

# 2026 High Priority Project Guide

## A Supplement to the Missouri Cancer Action Plan

### *Introduction*

The Missouri Cancer Action Plan 2021-2025 was created to inform cancer control and prevention work across the state. It reflects strategies to reduce the human and economic burden of cancer on Missourians through the promotion of collaborative, innovative, effective programs and policies.

Developed in consultation with Missouri Cancer Consortium, the *2026 High Priority Project Guide* describes topic areas targeted for investment by the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, August 2025 through December 2026. The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program will be requesting proposals for community-based and partner-led projects that reduce disparities in cancer screening, prevention, and survival. Disparities include geographic, racial/ethnic group, insurance coverage status, disability, sex, and others.

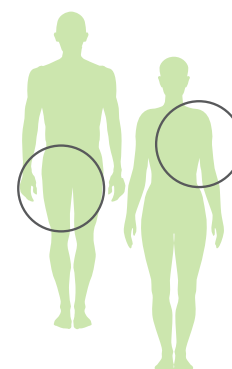
The Executive Committee of the Missouri Cancer Consortium and management of the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services) acknowledge some important objectives of the Missouri Cancer Action Plan 2021-2025 are not represented in this guide. They remain critical to the health and well-being of Missourians and are addressed by established activities and strategies of Missouri Cancer Consortium partners. The topic areas were selected based on implementation feasibility, coalition-building needs, and probability of near-term success.



### Screening

***Goal: Ensure all Missourians, especially individuals at higher risk due to social determinants, have access to high-quality screening, genetic counseling, and clinical services for early detection and diagnosis of cancer.***

***Background.*** Each type of cancer has recommendations for when to start screening and how often, and these recommendations may differ between professional organizations. Some individuals at higher risk may require earlier and more frequent screening, and should therefore discuss screening recommendations with their healthcare provider. High priority projects align with recommendations by the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) and serve communities at highest risk of cancer-related morbidity and mortality.



*High Priority Projects:*

1. *Lung cancer screening completion.* Lung cancer is the second most common cancer, but is the leading cause of cancer mortality in the U.S., with a relative five-year survival rate of just 21%. The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program is interested in community- and clinic-based strategies that increase the number of adults ages 55-80 with a history of smoking who receive a low-dose computed tomography scan. Successful strategies increase the proportion of lung cancer cases identified at early stages and lift the five-year survival rate.



2. *Community outreach for colorectal cancer screening options.* In response to low rates of colorectal screening and high mortality rates, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to support outreach and education strategies that increase the number of adults ages 45 to 75 who have been screened during the past 10 years. While the colonoscopy is the gold standard screening for colon cancer, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program encourages the use of effective-and-less-invasive alternatives, including lab specimen testing. Missouri needs strategies that identify eligible screening cases in high risk communities and assure screening task completion (e.g., appointment scheduling, appointment show rate, sample collection).



3. *Retail and community-based access points.* As part of a broad, multi-layered effort to increase access to cancer screening, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program supports the establishment of direct access and/or trackable referrals to screening for all types of cancer. Retail and community-based access points include stores/groceries, pharmacies, recreation centers, worksites and other non-clinical sites. Successful strategies increase the number of people who complete an evidence-based cancer screening appropriate for their demographic profile.



4. *Genetic risk assessment.* Genetic testing for cancer helps with early diagnosis and preventive care for individuals and relatives. The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to establish or expand strategies that (a) use telehealth to provide counseling and testing access, (b) reduce stigma or fear by addressing misinformation about genetic testing outcomes (e.g., insurance discrimination, psychological impact), (c) offer access to testing via community-based sites, and (d) embed genetic screening in standard primary care workflows. The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program prefers genetic testing interventions that target cancers where risk assessment impacts diagnostic or treatment outcomes.

## Prevention

**Goal: Reduce all Missourians' risk of cancers associated with health behaviors and environmental carcinogens.**

**Background:** It is estimated that 42% of cancer cases and 45% of cancer deaths in the United States are linked to modifiable risk factors and are, therefore, preventable. These lifestyle risk factors include tobacco use, poor diet, alcohol, excess body weight, cancer-associated infections, UV radiation, and lack of exercise. Given tobacco is the leading cause of cancer, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program encourages all efforts – local and statewide – that reduce initiation and increase cessation of tobacco products. The high priority projects described below pursue strategies beyond tobacco prevention and control, which has been a focus of many government and non-profit agencies.

45% of U.S. cancer deaths are linked to modifiable risk



### High Priority Projects:



5. *Community-based nutrition education and organizational role-modeling.* The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to increase the number of community-based or faith-based organizations that participate in nutrition training offered by the University of Missouri Extension Center. This strategy also includes shifting their policies and/or practices to increase healthy food availability and choices at hosted events/activities. Trusted, local organizations that gather people offer a special opportunity to promote fruits, vegetables, and nutritious recipes that set a strong foundation for cancer prevention, including weight loss. Successful projects in this area build capacity for these organizations to lead an array of other prevention activities in collaboration with the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program.



6. *Radon gas exposure.* Radon is a radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer. The colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas often enters homes through cracks in the foundation or other openings. The reduction of exposure to radon gas is a clearly stated objective in the Missouri Cancer Action Plan. In pursuit of this objective, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program supports projects that increase use of environmental testing kits for homes, schools or public buildings. Projects in this area improve the distribution of free kits, increase the workforce capacity of licensed radon testing professionals, and/or change landlord policies.



7. *Healthcare provider training for effective prevention counseling.* The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to train healthcare providers with counseling methods that support patients with healthy lifestyle behaviors (e.g., nutrition, physical activity) and inform decision-making about cancer-preventing vaccines. Providers who give clear, confident endorsements of effective cancer prevention strategies influence patient behaviors and outcomes. Successful strategies in this area expand Missouri's number of healthcare providers who employ evidence-based prevention counseling methods in clinical and/or community-based settings.

## Survivorship

**Goal: Improve the quality of life for cancer survivors across physical, emotional, social and vocational domains**



**Background.** Due to advances in the early detection and treatment of cancer, people are living many years after a diagnosis. However, disparities in healthcare access impact survival. Low-income people who have inadequate or no health insurance coverage are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at a later stage, often reducing survival time. For the over 500,000 adult cancer survivors living in Missouri, access to resources and supports that address physical, emotional, social, spiritual and financial challenges due to a cancer diagnosis and treatment is critical to long-term recovery and quality of life.

### High Priority Projects:



8. *Reduce food insecurity.* Cancer survivors experiencing food insecurity may face greater challenges in recovery, as limited access to nutritious food can compromise immune function, energy levels, and overall health outcomes. The Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to increase the number of cancer centers and community-based organizations that address food insecurity among cancer survivors.



9. *Inform decisions about survivorship resources offered by employers and payers.* Approximately one-third of cancer survivors in the United States are of working age. Studies show varying return-to-work rates after cancer treatment, with some indicating about 62% have returned to work or continued working within 12 months of diagnosis. Acknowledging the influential role of employer-sponsored health plans, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to invest in activities that change insurance coverage, wellness benefit programs, and employer policies and/or resources in ways that improve survivor quality of life.



10. *Expand access to mental and behavioral support services for all ages.* Cancer survivors often experience a wide range of mental health needs, which can be just as critical as their physical recovery. Working through a network of partners, the Missouri Comprehensive Cancer Control Program seeks to expand options for adult and child survivors to access psychosocial support services, such as counseling, therapy programs, peer support groups, mindfulness activities and more. Such services provide a safe and understanding space to share experiences, reduce feelings of isolation, promote emotional healing, and lift self-esteem. Support service access is especially needed for communities with a high cancer burden, including the un-/underinsured, Black/African Americans, and rural areas.

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