

Opening Statement

Chairman Bill Nelson

Senate Special Committee on Aging: The Fight Against Cancer: Challenges, Progress, & Promise

May 7, 2014

Today, the committee will hear a progress report on a topic that touches so many of us—the fight against cancer. Our nation has the greatest system of cancer care in the world. Patients are living longer and more productive lives thanks to advances in cancer research that can be directly traced to the investments our country has made in the NIH and the National Cancer Institute.

This federal support has accelerated the pace of new discoveries and the development of better ways to prevent, detect, diagnose, and treat cancer in all age groups.

While tremendous progress has been made, cancer remains a formidable opponent.

About 1.6 million Americans—the majority of them over age 55—will receive a cancer diagnosis this year, and more than 585,000 will die from the disease.

By the year 2030, cancer is projected to become the leading cause of death for Americans. Estimates say we could also see as many as 2.3 million people diagnosed with cancer annually – a 45 percent increase over today's total.

Meantime, mortality rates remain extraordinarily high for certain cancers, such as pancreatic, liver, lung, and ovarian cancers -- ranging from 30% survival likelihood in five years, to less than 1%.

And, while we have made incredible progress in tripling the number of survivors in the last 40 years, the fact remains that we know little about the impact of cancer treatments on the body as it ages.

Though many have been cured by groundbreaking advances, there are still people across our nation right now that are dependent on the next clinical trial, the next great research advance—to keep them alive just a little bit longer.

That's why it's imperative we remain committed to doubling down on the war against cancer.

And, one place to start is to renew our federal funding commitment to innovative research that's taking place at universities, oncology centers and hospitals all around the country.

While Congress was able to restore \$1 billion in funding to the NIH and the National Cancer Institute in January, unfortunately their budgets remain far below what they were before sequestration.

I hope the committee's discussion here today serves as a first step toward making up this funding gap. I look forward to hearing from our panelists today on what we need to do next to win the fight against cancer. I hope their testimonies will inspire us to work together to get there faster.