



# Creating Cultures of Belonging: How Learning, Neuroscience, and Connection Strengthen Workplace Kindness and Health Equity

**HERO Forum**

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The American Cancer Society exists because the burden of cancer is unacceptably high.



## Our Vision:

End cancer as we know it, for everyone.

## Our Mission:

To improve the lives of people with cancer and their families through advocacy, research, and patient support to ensure everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer.



# 3-Pronged Approach to Improving the Lives of Cancer Patients and Families

Patient-centric strategy, grounded in equitable access to cancer care for all

## Discovery

**\$450M+**  
in grants

Largest private, nonprofit funder of cancer research in the United States

**2.5M+**  
Volunteer  
participants

Conduct some of the world's largest population studies of cancer

## Advocacy

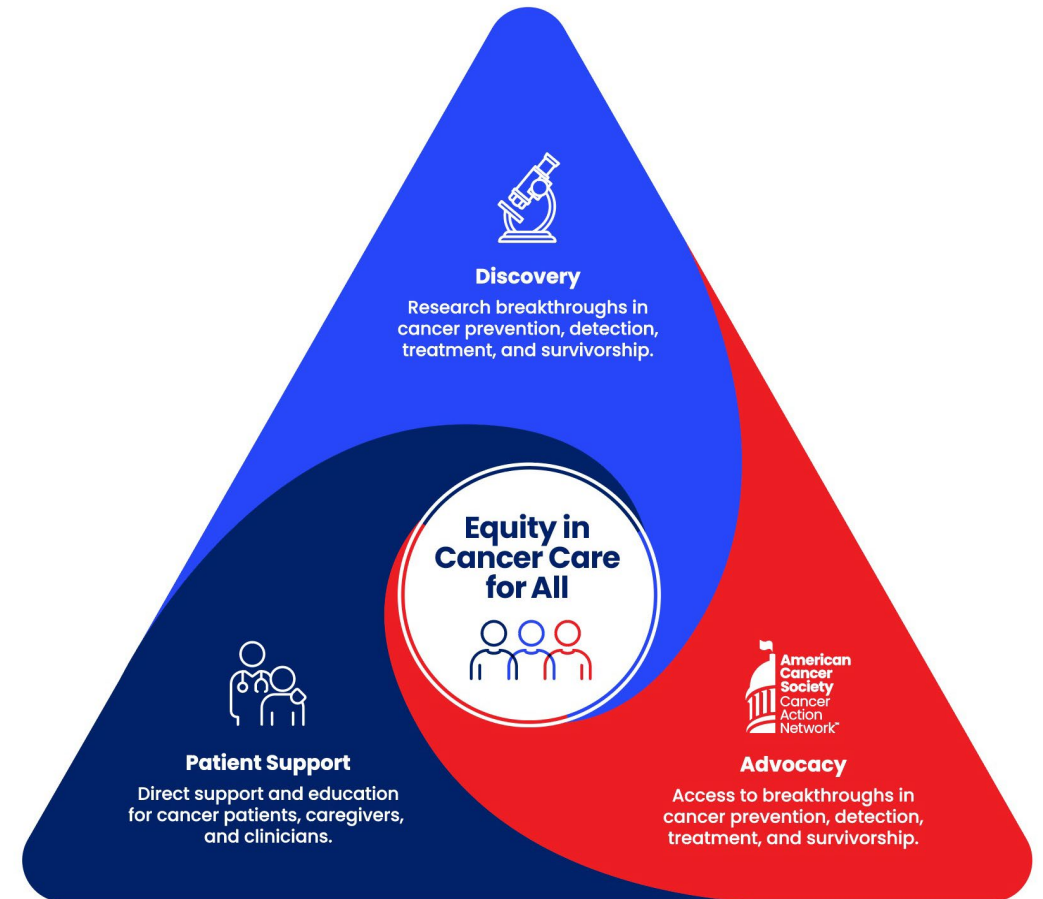
**50 states**  
the District of Columbia,  
Puerto Rico, and Guam

Advocacy presence at every level of government

## Patient Support

**79M+**  
Lives touched  
per year

Direct patient support\* in prevention, screening, lodging, transportation, navigation, survivorship, education



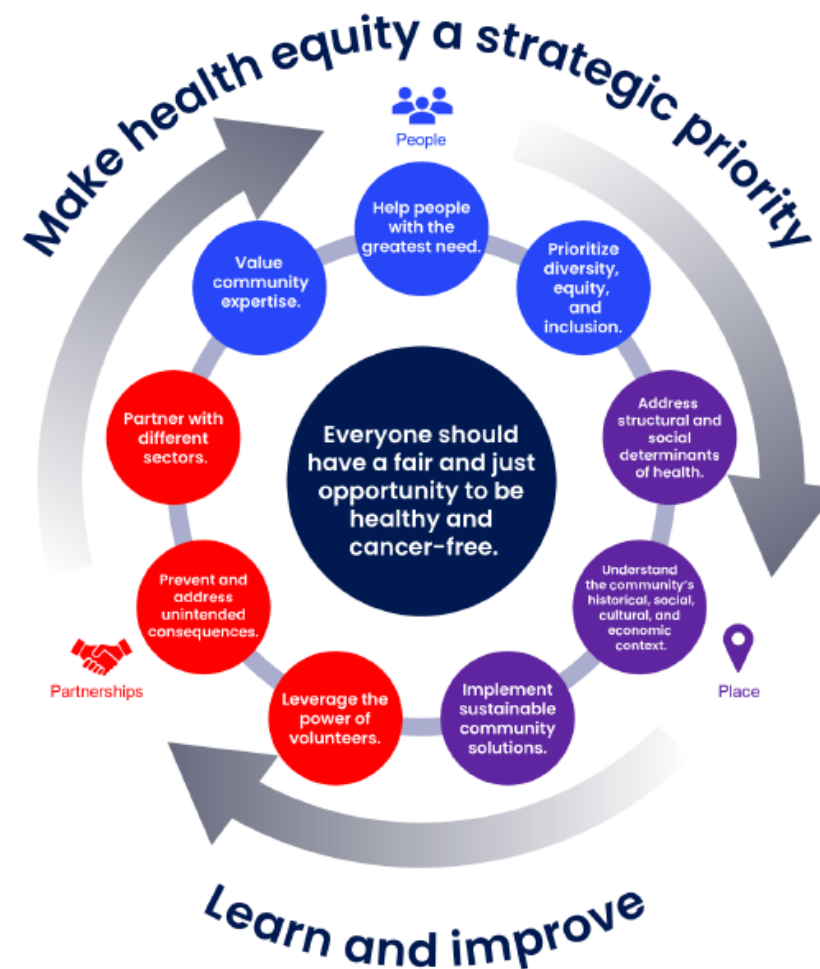
\* Patient support programs and services touch 21,000 communities within the US and its territories, or 71% of zip codes.

# Health Equity Principles

The **nine evidence-based Health Equity Principles** are the foundation of everything we do as an organization, they

- Guide our work.
- Foster a culture that embraces health equity.
- Express our commitment to making health equity a strategic priority.

**It is an expectation that everyone at ACS and ACS CAN – from frontline team members to volunteers understand and follow these principles.**



# Leading the Way in Addressing Health Disparities



No one should be disadvantaged in their fight against cancer because of how much money they make, the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, their disability status, or where they live.



## Black Communities

Blacks have the highest death rate for most cancers and shortest survival of any racial/ethnic U.S. group.



## Latinx Communities

Latino/Latina populations are more likely to be uninsured when compared to all other racial & ethnic groups.



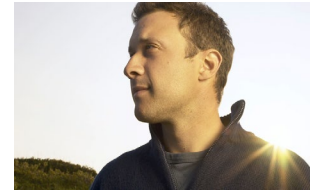
## Asian American Communities

Among Asian men, the 3 leading causes of cancer death are lung, liver, and colorectal. Among Asian women, they are lung, breast, and colorectal.



## LGBTQ Communities

Some studies suggest both tobacco and alcohol use are up to 1.5 times higher in the LGBTQ+ population, which likely create higher risks for tobacco and alcohol-related diseases, including certain cancers.



## Rural Communities

The poverty rate in the U.S. is 10.5% and that rate is much higher in various rural markets.



## Indigenous Communities

American Indians are less likely to have had a recent mammogram; American Indian and Alaska Native men are 2nd only to Black men in prostate cancer death rates.



## Disabled Communities

CDC data shows that differently abled people are less likely to receive recommended cancer screening tests than those without disabilities.

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You do not need to  
understand to treat  
everyone with respect  
and dignity.

# Trust is the Starting Point: Neuroscience Connects Engagement, Belonging and Performance

- 70% of team engagement is influenced by managers. (*Gallup 2024*)
- When people feel connected at work, there's 70% increase in wellbeing and 51% less turnover (*Gallup 2024*)
- Even with great health benefits, stress and burnout persist when leadership and culture lack psychological safety. (*McKinsey Institute, 2023*)
- Belonging is a neurological need. When 2/3 of a team reports strong social ties, creativity, productivity and safety improve dramatically. (*Gallup, 2024*)





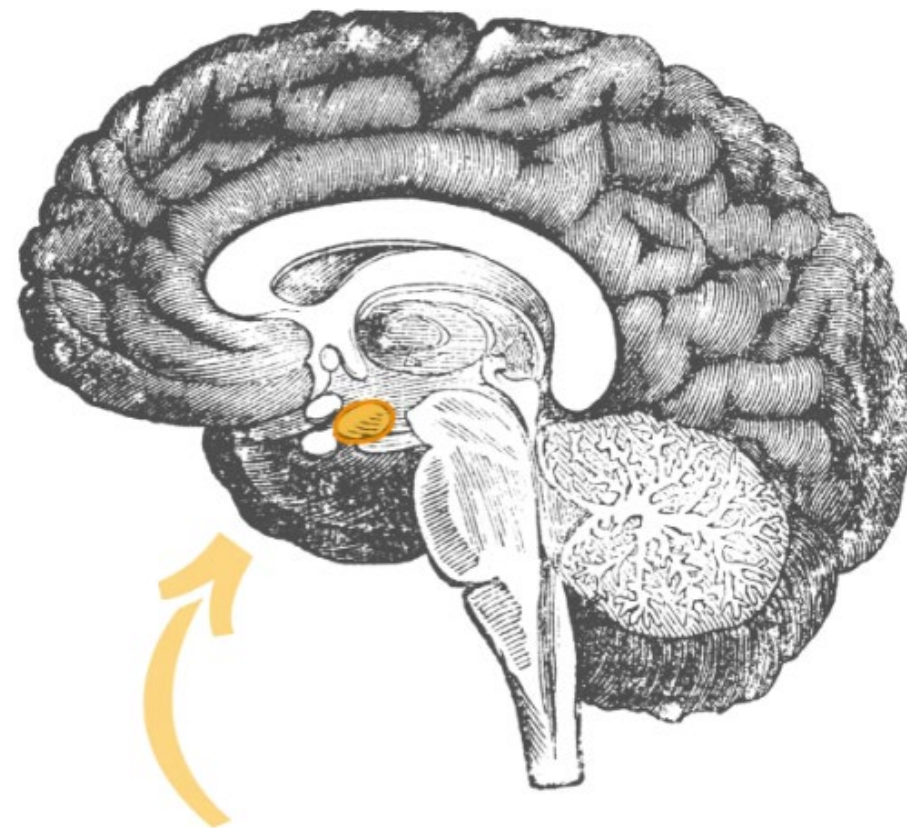
# Why Neuroscience for Inclusion?

- Inclusion and belonging are deeply rooted in brain science.
- Psychological safety and empathy impact how we connect and collaborate.
- Understanding the brain helps build better, kinder workplaces.



# Psychological Safety & Threat Response

- Exclusion activates the brain's threat system (amygdala).
- This impairs learning, creativity, and collaboration.
- Safe environments unlock full cognitive potential.



**Amygdala** is the “fear-center” of the human brain. It sparks many of our emotions, fears, and impulse reactions

# SCARF Model for Inclusive Leadership



- These are brain-based social needs.
- Inclusive practices can fulfill these needs and reduce threat.

# Empathy & Mirror Neurons

- We are wired to feel what others feel.
- Empathy is amplified through storytelling and perspective sharing.
- Practices: Empathy mapping, active listening.

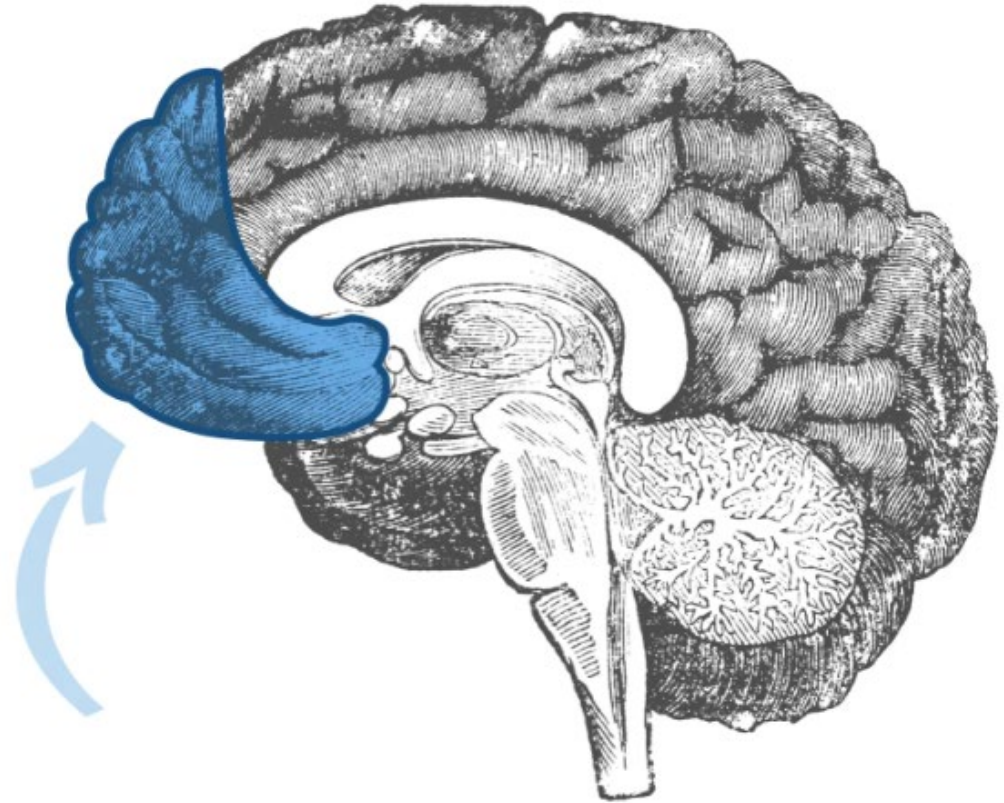
## Empathy Mapping





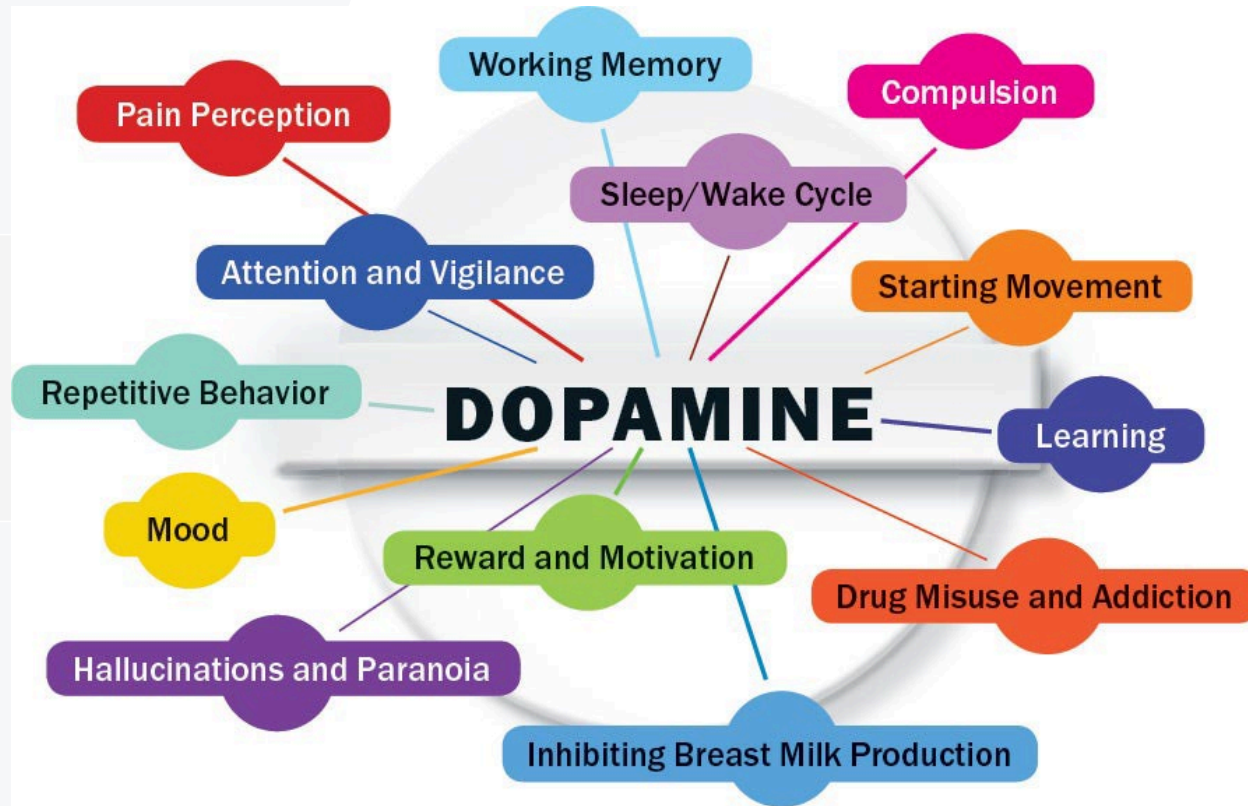
# Bias Interruption & Prefrontal Cortex

- Bias is automatic. Inclusion is intentional.
- The prefrontal cortex helps us override snap judgments.
- Tools: PAUSE-reflect-reframe techniques.



**Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)** is used when we reason through different perspectives, weigh pros and cons, or even revise out previous assumptions about things and people

# Belonging & the Brain's Reward System



- Belonging triggers dopamine—the same reward as food or praise.
- Small acts of inclusion matter (names, input, recognition).
- These create a feedback loop of engagement and trust.

# Key Internal Initiatives

# DEI Learning and Development

## Yearly Observance Months/Cultural Moments

Month	Event
January	Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service
February	African American/Black History Month International Day of Women & Girls in Science
March	Women's History Month
April	Inclusion Table Talk Event
May	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month
June	LGBTQ+ Pride Month
July	Young Professional Highlight
August	Working Parent Highlight
September	Hispanic Heritage Month
October	National Disability Employment Awareness Month
November	Veterans Day Native American Heritage Month
December	All EEGs Celebration & Year in Review



## DEI Heritage and Awareness Events

provides learning opportunities and a platform to raise awareness about the contributions and experiences of specific communities. It also celebrates the diversity of cultures, traditions, and histories that make up our society, promoting a better understanding and appreciation of different communities.

## Inclusion Table Talks

designed to facilitate open and respectful conversations among people from diverse backgrounds, fostering awareness and DEI. It aims to create a safe space for individuals to share their experiences and perspectives, promoting mutual understanding, cultural competency, empathy, inclusivity, and a sense of community.

## Days of Understanding

promotes mutual understanding and empathy among individuals from diverse backgrounds or perspectives through workshops, discussions, and activities, fostering dialogue and empathy to bridge gaps in understanding between different groups, promote tolerance, and encourage meaningful interactions.



# Employee Engagement Groups (EEGs)

## What are they?

Employee Engagement Groups (EEGs) are voluntary and employee-led groups that serve as a resource for their members and the enterprise by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with our mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives. Each group develops its own set of business goals and works together to achieve them. Every Employee Engagement Group (EEG) welcomes any and all members of the American Cancer Society, including full-time, part-time, and temporary employees, regardless of identity, background, or heritage.

## Purpose

EEGs strive to establish an open forum where employees with shared interests can aspire, develop, and collaborate to educate, raise awareness, and share information about issues pertinent to the group. EEGs also provide professional development, networking, and cultural appreciation opportunities for those involved to create a positive work environment.

## Impact on our mission

- EEGs produce monthly calls and webinars highlighting various cancer topics, cultural content and mission education related to the employees of the American Cancer Society and the people with cancer and their families who we serve.
- Our membership offers professional development, drives key community initiatives, and provides endless volunteer opportunities and chances to be noticed by management.
- EEGs give an opportunity to improve cultural competency and make us more aware of differences in discussions about cancer prevention, early detection, and screening, so that we can end cancer as we know it, for everyone.

### An inclusive work environment focused on diversity and equity

Employee Engagement Groups (EEGs) are voluntary and employee-led groups that serve as a resource for their members and the enterprise by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with our mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives. Each group develops its own set of business goals and works together to achieve them.

Email [inclusion@cancer.org](mailto:inclusion@cancer.org) with any questions or for additional information about Employee Engagement Groups.


#### About EEGs

Every Employee Engagement Group (EEG) welcomes any and all members of the American Cancer Society, including full-time, part-time, and temporary employees, regardless of identity, background, or heritage. EEGs strive to establish an open forum where employees with shared interests can aspire, develop, and collaborate to educate, raise awareness, and share information about issues pertinent to the group. EEGs also provide professional development, networking, and cultural appreciation opportunities for those involved to create a positive work environment.

Accessible ACS EEG	[+] Expand
African American/Black EEG	[+] Expand
Asian American Pacific Islander EEG	[+] Expand
GenACS: Millennial EEG	[+] Expand
LGBTQ+ & Allies EEG	[+] Expand
MI ACS: Latino EEG	[+] Expand
Military Family & Veterans EEG	[+] Expand
Working Parents EEG	[+] Expand

#### EEG News & Information

**Featured**



**Celebrate our Virtual Pride Parade on June 28**

ACS2Go - 5 days ago

New Pride logos and Get Screened messaging now available.

**Featured**

# BOLD EEGs in Innovation Summit

Philadelphia, PA | December 2-4, 2024



**FIRST-EVER SUMMIT** with 40 leaders from all 8 EEGs to:

- Focus on skill development to foster an inclusive workplace
- Enhance cross-functional collaboration and workforce diversity
- Celebrate 10th Anniversary of EEGs: A decade of progress and innovation

## Key Sessions:

- Activating Resiliency in the 5P's Era
- 4Cs Strategic Framework: Culture, Career, Commerce, Community
- Building EEG Strategies & Planning with Executive Sponsors



# ASPIRE In-Person Workshop

Cohort 2 | November 18-21, 2024

This 2.5-day workshop in Atlanta brought together 14 diverse leaders to develop leadership skills.



Highlights featured a fireside chat with Dr. Wayne Frederick, along with activities like visioning boards and capstone presentations, empowering participants to drive meaningful impact within ACS and ACS CAN.



Key sessions included:

- Leadership Panel
- Powerful Conversations
- Visionary Leadership
- Emotional Intelligence
- Self-branding & Self-advocacy
- Effective Leadership & ACS Mission



# Key External Initiatives





## About the Partnership

Together, boldly lead progress towards cancer equity by addressing cancer injustice with measurable, sustainable and systemic solutions to deliver access to high-quality care and treatments for everyone.

## Guiding Principles

- Empower people with **access to high-quality care and treatment** through information, resources and scalable community-level solutions.
- **Deepen understanding** of structural & health related social needs (HRSN) that lead to an unequal burden of cancer
- Mobilize **capacity building and patient-centered programming** to overcome barriers for systematically disadvantaged and under-resourced populations.
- Goal: Advance enhanced outcomes for all lives touched by cancer.

## Partnership Objectives

- Accelerate **comprehensive health equity solutions** for individuals through targeted support of ACS-led initiatives
- Activate **system-level interventions** and sustainable strategies grounded in assessments of social determinants of health and systemic challenges.
- Transform care through **sustainable navigation training** and credentialing program activities.
- **Mobilize community networks** to advance cancer health equity through community outreach and education.
- Foster **impactful moments** for thought leadership, connection, and contributions within national and local ecosystems, focusing on intervention, data sharing, and evidence-based education and training for patients and providers.
- **Elevate shared achievements** and impact to increase awareness and inspire others to take the lead.



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# Pillars of Impact

1. Demonstrate the **impact of private public coming together** to drive impactful solutions
2. Define sustainable national and community-level capacity-building tactics to address structural & health related social needs (HRSN) through **screening, referral, and navigation**
  - a. Connect with and equip healthcare providers **in targeted states with training, tools, resources, and support** necessary to effectively screen and navigate individuals with cancer through their journey and address barriers to care
  - b. Determine the **unique characteristics/health relates social needs (HRSN)** of populations that may impact health outcomes and access to care.
  - c. Enhance professional education for non-clinical navigators to ensure a highly trained and effective workforce through the ACS Leadership in Oncology Navigation (ACS LIONTM).
3. Promote programs and services that **support access** to timely care and treatment with targeted focus on under-resourced populations.
4. Activate **representative non-clinical Health Equity Ambassador network** to deliver cancer prevention and early detection education.
5. Drive **public policy change** to ensure equitable access to care for all cancer patients across state, federal and regulatory arenas



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A photograph of two Black women laughing joyfully. The woman on the left is bald and wearing a yellow shirt. The woman on the right has short curly hair and is wearing a blue top. They are in a room with large windows and a green plant in the background. A blue banner with white text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

# Health Equity Ambassador (HEA) Program



# Health Equity Ambassador (HEA) Program



## What

Led by our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team, the goal of the Health Equity Ambassador (HEA) program is to **promote cancer care equity through community outreach and education.**

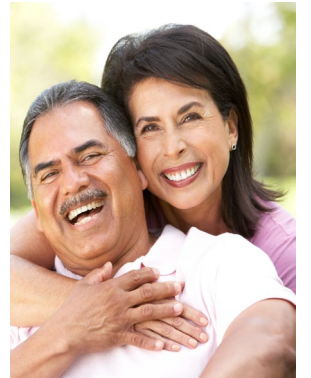
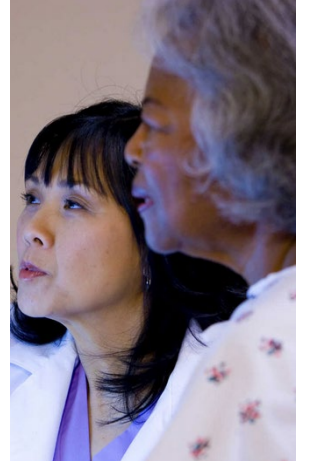
## Why

**African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, and uninsured individuals are more likely to develop and die from cancer than the general U.S. population.** Limited access to quality health care greatly impacts one's ability to access early detection resources. This often results in late-stage diagnoses, which limits life-saving treatment options.

## How

The HEA program **addresses cancer disparities by developing capacity to educate, mobilize, and engage diverse communities in cancer risk reduction and detection.** The American Cancer Society and partnering organization(s), work together to mobilize a **volunteer workforce of trained Health Equity Ambassadors**; to help underserved individuals and historically marginalized communities prevent and find cancer early.

## Impact of the HEA Program



**1.1 million** Lives Touched

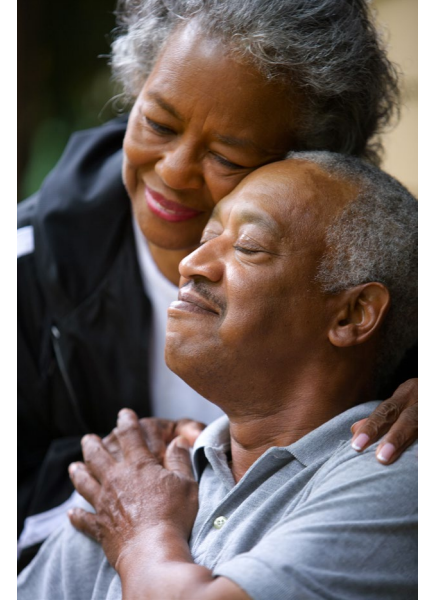
**6400+** Volunteer Ambassadors Trained

# Health Equity Ambassador (HEA) Program

## Connecting with Community

By partnering with us, trusted Community Based Organizations:

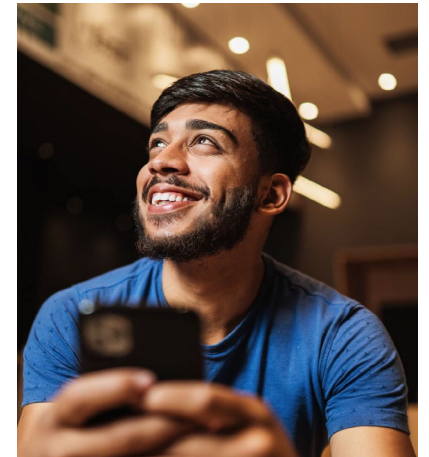
- Work to address the unequal burden of cancer in diverse and multicultural communities.
- Further this initiative and work to train and create a network of community Health Equity Ambassadors among the organization's members.
- Increase their member's capacity to disseminate community health interventions across our communities.
- Address cancer disparities by developing capacity to educate, mobilize and engage our communities in cancer risk reduction.



## Program Evaluation

**100%** of HEAs reported the training increased their overall understanding of prostate, breast, and colorectal cancers.

**94%** of HEAs reported the training provided them with the skills needed to conduct community outreach and cancer education.



# Hispanic Latino Engagement

## Health Equity Ambassador (HEA) Expansion in Puerto Rico

- Through funding from Genentech, the HEA program has **expanded its Hispanic/Latino engagement** and Spanish-language transcreation and curriculum to Puerto Rico.
- This initiative is in partnership with the **Puerto Rico Science, Technology, and Research Trust** (PRSTRT), an organization dedicated to advancing the island's economy and public health through innovation in science and technology.
- The team is aligning with Equal Measure to assess the implementation, and strategic value of the Health Equity Ambassador Program in Puerto Rico by examining how it enhances cancer prevention awareness, builds ambassador capacity, measures outreach effectiveness, and informs future program improvements to advance health equity impact.

## About the Activation

Together, we will expand community-based education on cancer prevention and early detection across Puerto Rico, with a strong focus on reaching rural and underserved populations.

## Summary Outcomes

**62** Ambassadors Trained    **5,000** Projected Lives Touched

[Recap video:](https://we.tl/t-POW87dwiRz)  
<https://we.tl/t-POW87dwiRz>



Puerto Rico  
Science, Technology  
& Research Trust

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Pictured (L to R) Efrain Santiago, Maria Christy, Jason Horay, Lucy Crespo, Tawana Thomas-Johnson, Dr. Feliciano-Lopez, Caio Timko Buschinelli & Naida Lugo



Pictured (L to R) Efrain Santiago, Sheila Gonzalez Perez, Caio Timko Buschinelli & Naida Lugo



# Hispanic Latino Engagement



Trained  
Health Equity  
Ambassadors



**Marianyoly Ortiz, Executive Director for the Puerto Rico Public Health Trust**

"At the Puerto Rico Public Health Trust, we are deeply committed to creating solutions by listening to the needs of our communities. Our work in cancer awareness and training reflects the mission to keep people safe, informed, and connected to the care they deserve. We are especially grateful to the American Cancer Society for trusting our program with the important responsibility of the Health Access Ambassadors initiative. Through prevention and improved access to health services, we strive to reduce the burden of cancer and strengthen the health and well-being of all communities across Puerto Rico."



Puerto Rico  
Science, Technology  
& Research Trust



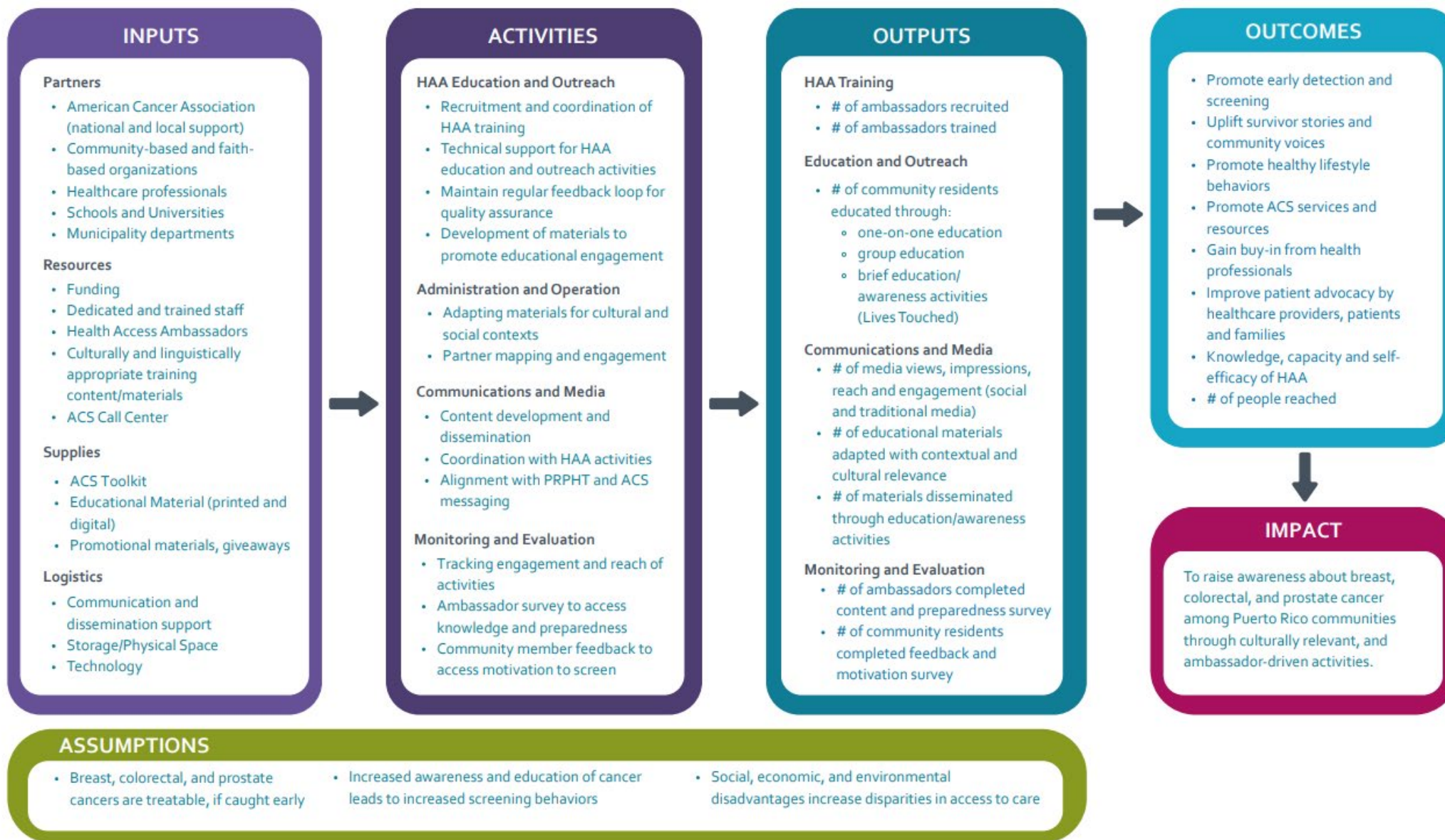
**Caio Timko Buschinelli, Director, Healthcare Market, Florida and Puerto Rico, Genentech**

"I was inspired by the engaging discussions at the Health Access Ambassador program in Puerto Rico. It's great to see the multi-organization partnership of ACS/PRST/Genentech working to educate community health workers, a vital step in advancing cancer health access and early diagnosis for a cancer-free tomorrow in the Island."

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# Logic Model



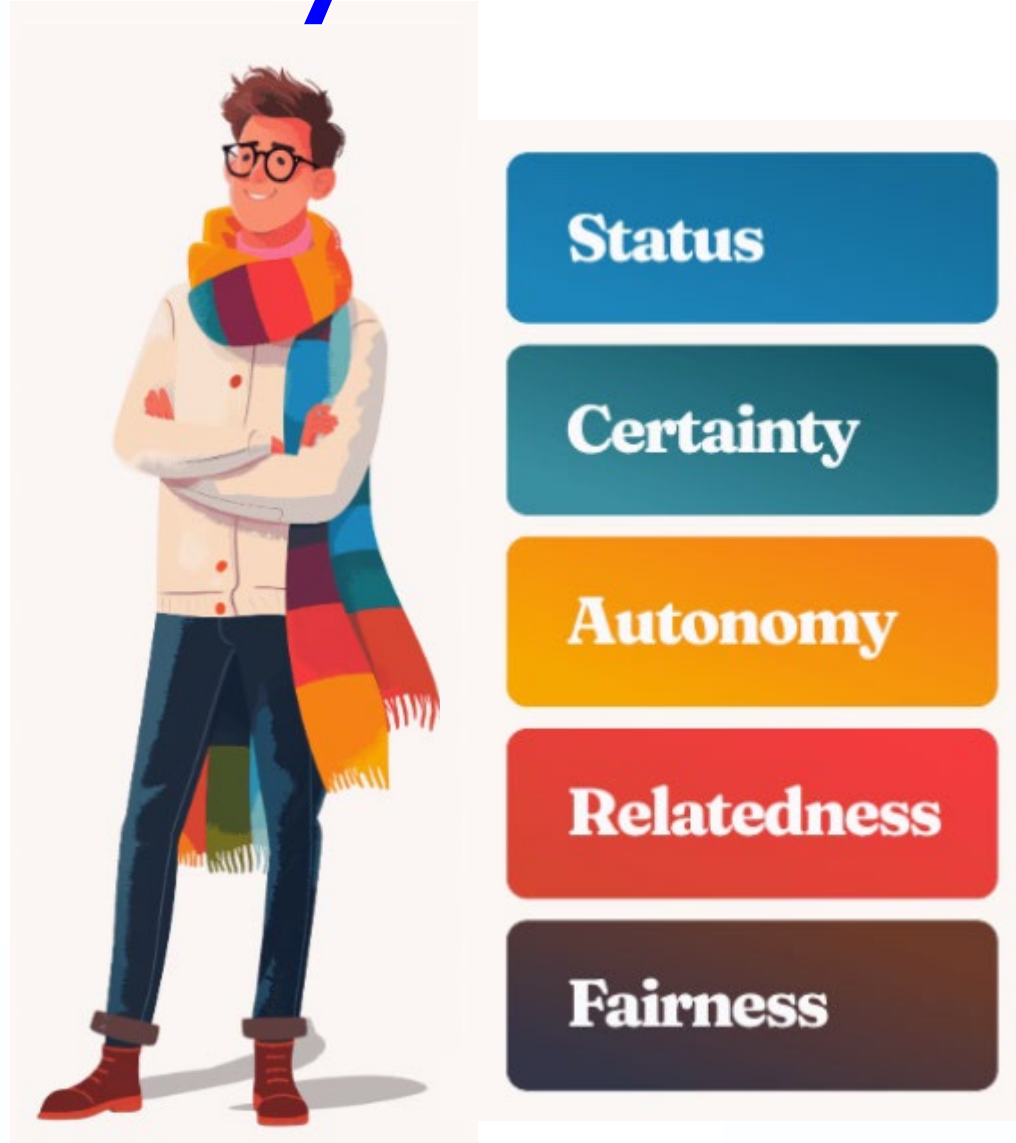


# Theory of Change



# Self-Paced SCARF Mapping Activity

- ① A brief intro to the SCARF model
- ② Two reflection prompts per domain and space for notes and takeaways.
- ③ A final “Next Step” section to encourage integration into daily practice.

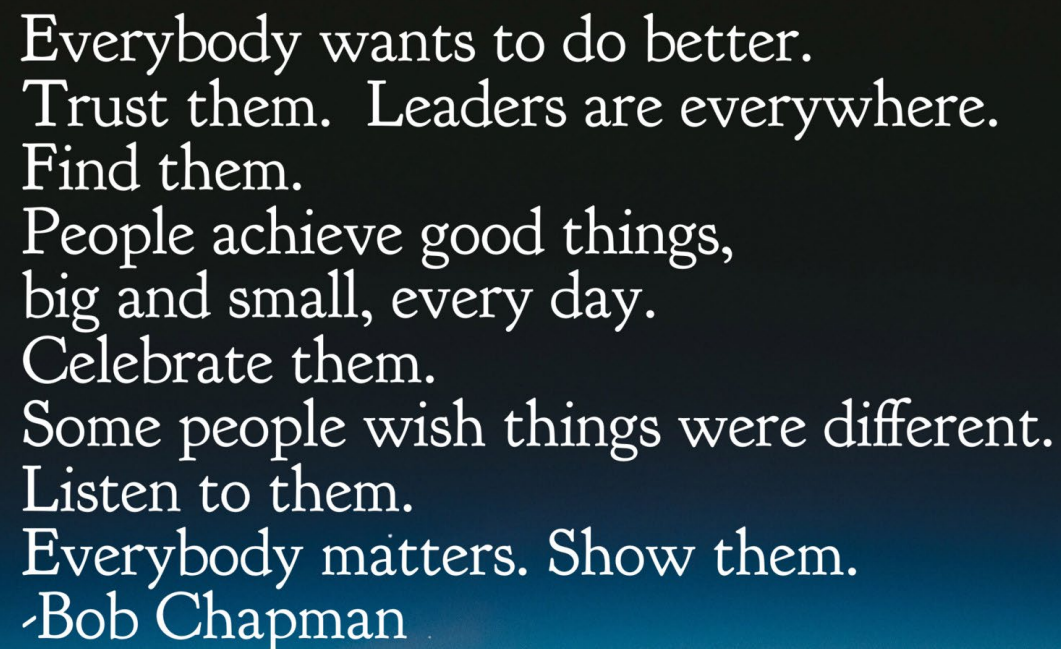


# Closing Reflection

1. What about your organization?
2. What opportunities do your employees have to grow and develop?
3. What is your organization doing to make a difference and contribute to the greater good?
4. What opportunities are you giving your people to connect with your company's purpose, to something bigger than themselves?
5. Would the community around you notice if your company disappeared tomorrow?
6. When we give our employees permission to be who they are, belong to a community that cares, contribute to something greater than themselves, and become who they are meant to be, we invite them on a journey to become whole and to be well.
7. At our core, each of us wants to be loved and valued for who we are and to be seen, heard, and known.



**What are we  
doing to foster  
a workplace  
culture that  
allows for that  
to happen?**

A photograph of a sunset or sunrise over a mountain range. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a dark blue at the top. The mountains are silhouetted against the bright horizon.

Everybody wants to do better.  
Trust them. Leaders are everywhere.  
Find them.  
People achieve good things,  
big and small, every day.  
Celebrate them.  
Some people wish things were different.  
Listen to them.  
Everybody matters. Show them.  
-Bob Chapman



# Key Takeaways

- Inclusion is good for the brain and the business.
- Empathy and safety can be taught and modeled.
- Leaders influence brain states every day—use that power wisely.





# Thank You!