

Cancer expert says public health and prevention measures are key to defeating cancer

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Is investment in research to develop new treatments the best approach to controlling cancer? Would emphasizing prevention bring about more return on investment? Should we channel what we are learning about precision medicine and the genome into cancer prevention, not treatment alone?

Many people believe that the time is right for another big push to defeat [cancer](#), including President Obama, who called for a major cancer-fighting campaign in his final State of the Union address. But in the latest paper, "Targeting the Cancer Moonshot" in *JAMA Oncology*, this kind of effort will never cure cancer without public health and prevention.

While there have been some important and notable cures for certain types of cancer in the last half-century, Alfred I. Neugut, MD, PhD, Myron M. Studner Professor of Cancer Research and professor of Epidemiology at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, and co-author Cary P. Gross, MD, Yale University School of Medicine, drive home the point that these cures are responsible for only a small fraction of improvements in mortality.

"The true successes of cancer have been made in prevention," notes Dr. Neugut, who is also professor of Medicine at the Herbert Irving Comprehensive Center at Columbia. In particular, lung cancer rates have

plummeted in the U.S.—but from the decline in smoking rates. There are other cancer success stories as well—from screening techniques for colon and [cervical cancer](#) to vaccines that will help wipe out the latter disease completely.

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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