



Minnesota Cancer Alliance



minnesota cancer alliance summit

2026 | *the power of collaboration*



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February 26, 2026
McNamara Alumni Center



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Welcome Message

Welcome to the Minnesota Cancer Alliance Cancer Summit 2026. It is truly an honor to gather with partners, advocates, clinicians, researchers, public health professionals, policy makers and community leaders from across the state who share a common goal: reducing the burden of cancer in Minnesota.

Our Purpose Today

The intent of today is both simple and powerful:

- Launch and share the updated Cancer Plan Minnesota
- Highlight real-world cancer experiences
- Identify and support champions
- Build momentum for ongoing alliance work

This Summit reflects our shared belief that meaningful progress happens through collaboration. When we work together—across systems and alongside communities—we strengthen our collective impact. The updated Cancer Plan Minnesota provides a roadmap, but it is through your leadership, partnership, and commitment that the plan becomes action.

With Gratitude

Today would not be possible without the dedication and generosity of many partners. We extend sincere appreciation to our sponsors and exhibitors for their support and investment, our speakers and moderators for sharing their expertise and insight, our planning committee for months of thoughtful preparation, and the many volunteers and staff who worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

Most importantly, thank you for being here. Your presence demonstrates a shared commitment to advancing equitable cancer prevention and care across Minnesota. I look forward to a day of learning, connection, and collective action.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Fangel".

Laura Fangel
Steering Committee and Summit Planning Committee Chair
Minnesota Cancer Alliance





Continuing Education Hours

Continuing education credit hours (CME, ANCC, and CHES) will be available to attendees who complete the evaluation via QR code provided throughout the day. Evaluation must be completed within 7 days of the summit. Certificate will be emailed within 30 days of evaluation completion.



CME

This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) through the joint providership of the Minnesota Medical Association and Minnesota Cancer Alliance. The Minnesota Medical Association (MMA) is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

The Minnesota Medical Association designates this activity for a maximum of *4.5 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit(s)*[™]. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

ANCC

Participants can earn up to 4.75 contact hours.

This nursing continuing professional development activity was approved by the Oregon Nurses Association, an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.

CHES

Sponsored by Minnesota Cancer Alliance, a designated provider of Continuing Education Contact Hours (CECH) in health education by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. This program is designated for Certified Health Education Specialists (CHES®) and/or Master Certified Health Education Specialists (MCHES®) to receive up to 5.25 total Category I CECH. Maximum advanced-level CECH available are 3.25. Continuing Competency credits are not available.





8:00 – 8:45 am

Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:45 – 9:50 am

Welcome Plenary: Telling Minnesota's Cancer Story - Memorial Hall

The plenary will highlight statewide cancer trends, progress, and disparities, featuring data from the Minnesota Cancer Registry and University of Minnesota catchment reports, perspectives from Tribal Nations and the African American community. Moderated by Dr. Halkeno Tura of the Minnesota Department of Health.

10:00 – 10:50 am

Breakout Session #1

- Lung Cancer Screening - Our Communities and Beyond - Memorial Hall
- Vaccine Advocacy for Cancer Prevention - Thomas Swain
- Equitable Access to Clinical Trials Across Minnesota - University Hall
- Examining the Role of Food and Cooking Practices in Cancer Prevention - Heritage Gallery
- Building Comprehensive Cancer Control in a Tribal Nation - Ski-U-Mah

11:00 – 11:50 am

Breakout Session #2

- Community-Based Strategies to Expand Colorectal Cancer Screening - University Hall
- Reducing Cancer Risk Through Community Outreach, Awareness, and Prevention - Memorial Hall
- Closing the Gap: Building a Professional Healthcare Workforce that Reflects Our Patient Population - Ski-U-Mah
- Practices in Integrating Caregiver Support into Health System Practice - Thomas Swain
- The Rural Oncology Home Model at Lakewood Health System - Heritage Gallery

11:50 am – 12:40 pm

Lunch and Awards Ceremony - Memorial Hall

12:40 – 1:20 pm

Policy Pathways: Advancing Minnesota's Cancer Plan Together Discussion - Memorial Hall

Featuring multiple speakers from across the spectrum of policy and advocacy. A focused discussion on policy priorities and advocacy strategies supporting the goals of the updated Cancer Plan Minnesota and promoting equitable cancer care across the state. Moderated by Emily Myatt, ACS Cancer Action Network.

1:30 – 2:20 pm

Breakout Session #3

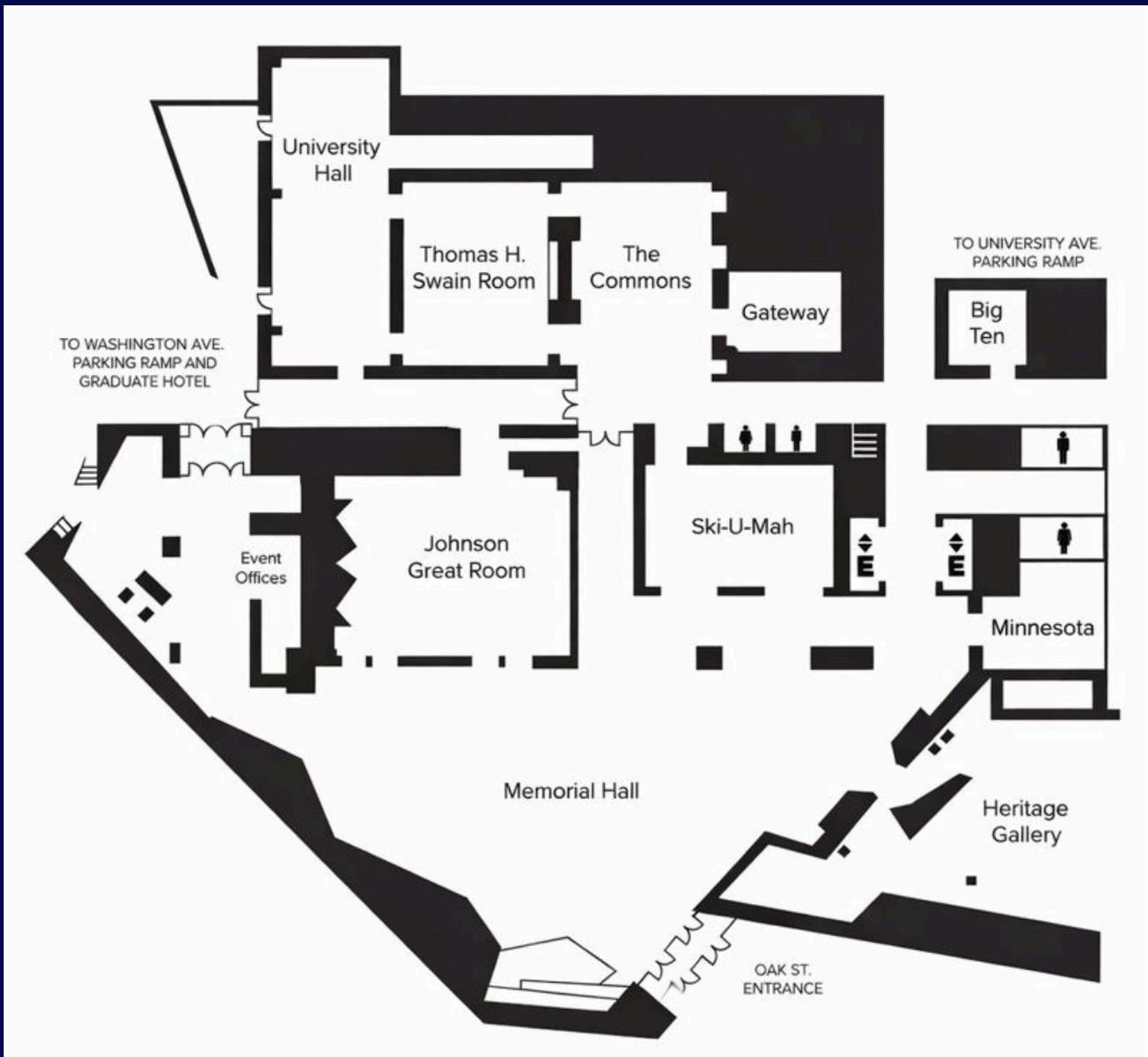
- The Breast Cancer Champions: A Peer-to-Peer program to reduce the burden of breast cancer in communities of African Heritage in MN - Ski-U-Mah
- Honoring Culture, Advancing Equity: Community-Led Cancer Prevention - Thomas Swain
- Beyond Treatment: Building Connected Pathways for Cancer Survivorship - University Hall
- Powering Equity: How Community Health Workers Fill Gaps in Cancer - Heritage Gallery
- Artificial Intelligence in Cancer Screening Navigation, Early Detection, and Therapeutic Decision Making - Memorial Hall

2:30 – 3:30 pm

Fireside Connect: A Real Life Look at the Impact of Cancer - Memorial Hall

A candid panel discussion featuring perspectives from a surgeon, medical oncologist, nurse navigator, cancer survivor, and caregiver, offering real-world insights into the challenges, triumphs, and human impact of cancer across Minnesota. Presented by Allina Health Cancer Institute.

Venue Map





Speaker Biographies

Welcome Plenary



Halkeno Tura, PhD, MA, MPH, CHES

Dr. Halkeno Tura serves as Assistant Commissioner for Health at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), where he oversees divisions focused on health promotion and chronic disease prevention, injury and substance misuse prevention, mental health, and child and family health. He previously led MDH's Health Equity Strategy and Innovation Division and oversaw the Offices of American Indian Health, African American Health, and Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Dr. Tura is also a public health researcher whose work focuses on the intersection of gender, maternal and child health, social norms, and health equity.



Jay Desai, PhD, MPH

Jay R. Desai PhD, MPH is a chronic disease epidemiologist at the Minnesota Department of Health. Dr. Desai received his doctorate in Epidemiology from the University of Minnesota. He currently leads the MDH Long COVID program, Sickle Cell Data Collection program, and the Minnesota Cancer Reporting System. He also spent 16 years as the epidemiologist for the Minnesota Diabetes and Diabetes Prevention program at MDH and 9 years as a Research Investigator at the HealthPartners Institute. He has expertise in community-based participatory engagement and action, implementation science and health equity.



Jen Poynter, PhD, MPH

Dr. Poynter is a Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Co-Associate Director for Community Outreach and Engagement at the Masonic Cancer Center at the University of Minnesota. Her research is focused on understanding genetic and environmental factors that impact cancer risk and survivorship. In her role as Co-AD for COE, she has implemented a new tool to understand the burden of cancer in the state of Minnesota.



Melissa Buffalo (Meskwaki/Dakota), MS

Melissa Buffalo is a citizen of the Meskwaki Nation and serves as CEO of the American Indian Cancer Foundation. Grounded in more than 15 years of public health experience and shaped by personal loss to cancer, she leads national efforts to address inequities in cancer prevention and care for Indigenous communities, centering culture, community, and healing across generations.



Clarence Jones, MA, CPH, CHW, CPE

Clarence Jones, M.A., CPH, CHW, and CPE, holds multiple credentials and serves as an Instructor of Medicine at Mayo Clinic. He has been active in community work since his teen years and understands that concerns about prostate cancer often motivate African American men to seek medical care. His work with Dr. Turesky on recent research, which involved many self-identified community members, gave him the chance to share information and help educate his community.



Speaker Biographies

Policy Discussion



Emily Myatt

Emily Myatt is the Regional Government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), where she leads strategy for advocacy campaigns, volunteer engagement and fundraising efforts across Minnesota. In 2023 she was recognized as the country's top government relations professional by ACS CAN, in honor of her exceptional work advocating for cancer-fighting public policies.



Jenn Schultz

A 4-time cancer survivor, Jenn Schultz is the State Lead Ambassador for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) in Minnesota, and she serves on the Associate Board for Athletes Committed to Educating Students (ACES), a nonprofit whose mission is to empower youth and expand opportunity through engaging, inclusive, and accessible learning experiences. An accomplished author and stellar advocate, Jenn also teaches at her alma mater, Concordia University.



Chris Smith

Chris Smith serves as a member of the African American Health State Advisory Council (AAHSAC), established in 2023 to advise the Minnesota health commissioner on advancing health equity for African American communities. As a community policy advocate with the Association for Nonsmokers-MN, Smith works on policy initiatives to address health disparities.



Rep. Liz Reyer, 52A

Representative Liz Reyer, District 52A has been a member of the State House since 2021. She is Co-Vice Chair of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee. She worked for 30 years in the business community, including 12 years at Blue Cross Blue Shield. In her professional life, she focused on understanding needs and implementing cost-effective and people-centered solutions. She's a certified Executive Coach and wrote a business advice column in the Star Tribune for 10 years.



Speaker Biographies

Fireside Connect



Jessica Quinlan-Woodward, RN

Jessica Quinlan-Woodward, RN is the Manager of Oncology Nurse Navigation at Allina Health. She serves on the Minnesota Cancer Alliance Steering Committee and Summit Planning Committee. Having been named a 2013 Outstanding Nurse by Mpls/St. Paul Magazine, Jessica has been involved in integrative health research and advancing the field of nurse navigation for over 20 years.



Daniel S. Carlson, DO

Dr. Daniel Carlson is a breast medical oncologist at the Piper Breast Center for the Allina Health Cancer Institute (AHCI). He is also one of the clinical investigators for AHCI. He has a background and strong interest in treating triple negative breast cancer and other high-risk breast cancers.



Ariella Altman, MD, MS

Dr. Ariella Altman is a surgical oncologist at Allina Health Cancer Institute. She has her master's degree in clinical research from the University of Minnesota and had a strong clinical interest in breast cancer, melanoma and sarcoma.



Madeline Bonifas, RN, OCN

Madeline Bonifas, RN graduated college and started working with oncology patients in 2015. She initially worked on a medical oncology/hematology floor and then transitioned to Piper Breast Center Breast Oncology Navigation in 2023 and has been in that role for the past 3 years. She is very passionate about breast cancer patients getting the support they need during their treatment journey.

Lorraine and Dave Schleicher

Lorraine and Dave Schleicher are married with 4 wonderful adult children. Lorraine moved to Minneapolis in 1991 with Northwest Airlines, which now is Delta Air Lines. She has been with the airlines for more than 37 years. Dave works for Park Nicollet in laboratory services.



Speaker **Biographies**

Breakout Sessions - **10:00 AM**

Lung Cancer Screening - Our Communities and Beyond



Brian Helmrick, MBA, LAT, ATC
Allina Health



Monica Cook, RN, BSN, OCN
Allina Health

Vaccine Advocacy for Cancer Prevention



Eileen Crespo, MD, FAAP
Delta Dental Minnesota



Jennifer Oliphant, EdD, MPH
Independent Researcher



Melody Doan, B.S.
Minnesota Department of Health

Examining the Role of Food and Cooking Practices in Cancer Prevention



Abby Gold, PhD, MPH, RD
University of Minnesota



Melissa Laska, PhD, RD
University of Minnesota



Hilary Gebauer, MPH, RDN, LD
Minnesota Department of Health



Robert Turesky, PhD
University of Minnesota



Clarence Jones, MA, CPH, CHW, CPE
Hue-Man Partnership



Madjda Bellamri, PhD
University of Minnesota



Logan Spector, PhD
University of Minnesota



Speaker **Biographies**

Breakout Sessions - **10:00 AM**

Building Comprehensive Cancer Control in a Tribal Nation



Caroline Blacketter, PhD, MTAG
Fond du Lac Band of Lake
Superior Chippewa



Norah Barrett Cooper
Angel Foundation

Equitable Access to Clinical Trials Across Minnesota



Heather Kehn, RN, BS, MPH
Metro Minnesota Community
Oncology Research Consortium



Yan Ji, MD, PhD, MS
Health Partners, Metro Minnesota
Community Oncology Research
Consortium



Wyatt Pickner, MPH
American Indian Cancer
Foundation



Kassandra Rimmel, BES, CCRP
Sanford Health NCORP



Dylan Zylla, MD, MS
Health Partners



Konstantinos Leventakos, MD, PhD
Mayo Clinic



Speaker **Biographies**

Breakout Sessions - **11:00 AM**

The Rural Oncology Home Model at Lakewood Health System



Wade Swenson, MD, MPH, MBA, FACP
Lakewood Health System

Reducing Cancer Risk Through Community Outreach, Awareness, and Prevention



Manal Abbadi
Mayo Clinic



Clarissa Rohm, BA
Mayo Clinic



Gladys Asiedu, PhD
Mayo Clinic



Daniel Wilson
Project REACH



Rachel Stoll, CHW
Minnesota Community Health
Worker Alliance



Daniel Tranter, MPH
Minnesota Department of Health



Speaker Biographies

Breakout Sessions - 11:00 AM

Community-Based Strategies to Expand Colorectal Cancer Screening



Natalie Marker, MArch, CPHQ
Community-University Health
Care Center



Lan Luu, MD, MPH
Community-University Health
Care Center



Amna Hussein, MBS
Masonic Cancer Center



Nachia Larson
MNGI Digestive Health



Francisco Ramirez
Fairview Health Services



Katie Verhulst, MPH
Masonic Cancer Center



Liz Francois, RN
Fairview Health Services

Practices in Integrating Caregiver Support into Health System Practice



Allison Breining, MA
The Negative Space



Ellen LaFontaine, MSW, LICSW
Fairview Health Services



Pamela Mason, MS
American Cancer Society

Closing the Gap: Building a Professional Healthcare Workforce that Reflects Our Patient Population



James R. Peters
Hennepin Health



Speaker **Biographies**

Breakout Sessions - **1:30 PM**

The Breast Cancer Champions: A Peer-to-Peer Program to Reduce the Burden of Breast Cancer in Communities of African Heritage in Minnesota



Gay Lynn Richards, DNP, RN, MPH
Breast Cancer Education Association



Fowzia Abdullahi, CHW
Breast Cancer Education Association



Benita Robinson, AA
Minnesota Department of Health



Minister Dr. Ni Ora Hokes, EdD, CHW
Breast Cancer Education Association

Artificial Intelligence in Cancer Screening, Navigation, Early Detection, and Therapeutic Decision Making



David G. Perdue, MD, MSPH
Navatar Health



Rui Zhang, PhD, FAMCI, FAMIA, FIAHSI
University of Minnesota



Ali Khammanivong, PhD, MS
Oncoidea



Speaker **Biographies**

Breakout Sessions - **1:30 PM**

Honoring Culture, Advancing Equity: Community-Led Cancer Prevention



Manal Abbadi, CPH
Mayo Clinic



Yeng M. Yang, MD, BMA, FAAP
Hmong Health Care
Professionals Coalition

Beyond Treatment: Building Connected Pathways for Cancer Survivorship



Wendy Worden, DNP, APRN, CNS
Mayo Clinic



Kris Newcomer, MA
Xanθος Health



David Haynes, PhD
Xanθος Health



Talaya Dendy, BPCA, NBC-HWC
On The Other Side

Powering Equity: How Community Health Workers Fill Gaps in Cancer Care



Rachel Stoll, CHW
Minnesota Community Health
Worker Alliance



Angela Fields, CHW
CHW Concepts LLC



Foua-Choua Khang, CHW, MBA
Blue Cross Blue Shield

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Minnesota Cancer Alliance

PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

The Minnesota Cancer Alliance is a broad partnership of organizations and leaders from across Minnesota. We represent public health and health care organizations, cancer centers, culturally diverse organizations, researchers, nonprofit organizations, cancer survivors, caregivers, and advocates — all dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer across the continuum from prevention and detection to treatment, survivorship, and end-of-life care.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds every state health department to support their cancer alliance. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Staff are our liaison between the MCA and the CDC.

Our Mission

To reduce the burden of cancer for all people living in Minnesota by working together to promote the goals of Cancer Plan Minnesota.

Our Vision

For Minnesota to be a place where:

- Preventable cancers do not occur
- People who develop cancer are diagnosed at the earliest stage possible
- People with cancer are given the highest quality, state-of-the-art care available to maximize their chances of survival and quality of life
- Preventable disparities in the prevention of cancer, and in the quality, experience, and outcomes of care for patients with cancer are eliminated
- Full support is given to research about the causes of cancers, prevention, early detection, treatment, quality of life, and palliation

Get Involved

There are many ways to get involved with the Minnesota Cancer Alliance.

- Become a member of the Minnesota Cancer Alliance - Summit attendees received a discount code to join as an individual for FREE!
- Join one of our committees that meet throughout the year to work on MCA efforts
- Participate in one of our network partnerships to align strategies and reduce duplicative work
- Sign up for our monthly newsletter to keep current on MCA activities and announcements
- Apply for Strategy Action Grant funding when available
- Volunteer at or share an idea for a future MCA event

Many Thanks!



Summit 2026 Planning Committee

This summit is only possible because of the hours of dedication from our planning committee. A special thank you goes out to: **Annie Halland**, Freya & Co; **Catherine Graeve**, St. Catherine's University; **Dr. David Perdue**, Navatar Health; **Erin Hartung**, Cancer Legal Care; **Erin Peterson**, Colon Cancer Coalition; **Haley Storms-Kruchten**, Minnesota Department of Health; **Jessica Quinlan-Woodward**, Allina Health; **Laura Fangel**, Metro-Minnesota Community Oncology Research Consortium; **Liz Moe**, Freya & Co; **Matt Flory**, American Cancer Society; and **Michelle Brasure**, Minnesota Department of Health.

MCA Steering Committee

Extended gratitude to the members of our Steering Committee who drive the mission of MCA forward. **Laura Fangel**, Chair, Metro-Minnesota Community Oncology Research Consortium; **Joanne Moze**, Vice Chair, Blue Cross Blue Shield; **Greg Fedio**, Member-At-Large, Health Partners; **Erin Hartung**, Treasurer, Cancer Legal Care; **Erin Peterson**, Immediate Past Chair, Colon Cancer Coalition; **Aleeta Steevens**, Masonic Cancer Center; **Alexandra Eberhart**, Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota; **Amber Kerrigan**, Advocates for Better Health; **Andrew Mendez**, Open Arms of Minnesota; **Ashley Pohlenz**, Masonic Cancer Center; **Caroline Blacketter**, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; **Catherine Graeve**, St. Catherine's University; **Chiara Acquati**, University of Minnesota; **Connie Norman**, Red Lake Community Health Services; **Corinna Sabaque**, American Indian Cancer Foundation; **Dr. David Perdue**, Navatar Health; **Foua-Choua Khang**, Blue Cross Blue Shield; **Jessica Quinlan-Woodward**, Allina Health; **Khatidja Dawood**, Minnesota Department of Health; **Kiara Ellis**, Masonic Cancer Center; **Matt Flory**, American Cancer Society; **Renee Garcia**, Minnesota Association of Community Health Centers; **Teri Cannon**, A Breath of Hope; and **Dr. Wade Swenson**, Lakewood Health System.

Cancer Plan Minnesota Team

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many individuals and partners who contributed to the development of Cancer Plan Minnesota. The Minnesota Cancer Alliance offers special appreciation to the members of the **Cancer Health Equity Network (CHEN)** for their leadership and steadfast commitment to ensuring that health equity serves as the foundation of this plan. We are also sincerely thankful to **Heather Kehn**, Metro-Minnesota Community Oncology Research Consortium for her tireless efforts in guiding the work during its formative months. Finally, we are profoundly grateful to the **community members** who participated in feedback sessions and generously shared their time, insight, and lived experiences to help shape a document that will guide our work for years to come. While we are unable to recognize every contributor by name, please know that we are deeply appreciative of each and every individual who played a role in bringing this plan to life.



Thank you for being part of the Minnesota Cancer Alliance Cancer Summit 2026. Your presence, engagement, and willingness to share your expertise and experiences made this gathering meaningful and impactful. We are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to advancing cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, survivorship, and health equity across our communities. As you return to your organizations and partners, we encourage you to carry forward the action steps you identified today. Real progress happens when ideas turn into action, and it is through your leadership and dedication that we will continue to reduce the burden of cancer in Minnesota.

Contact Information:

 communications@mncanceralliance.org

 <https://mncanceralliance.org/>

 PO Box 64975 St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

