



FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE:

Nairobi, 4th June 2021.

NATIONAL CANCER SURVIVORS' DAY AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
(A celebration of life -Fight, Hope and Believe)

INTRODUCTION:

National Cancer Survivors' Day is an annual event commemorated by communities all-over the world, on the first Sunday of June as a CELEBRATION for those who have survived cancer, an INSPIRATION for those recently diagnosed with cancer, a gathering of SUPPORT for families affected by cancer, and an OUTREACH to the community. It's a day for everyone to join in solidarity with cancer survivors around the world, to raise awareness of the ongoing challenges cancer survivors face because of their disease, and – most importantly – to celebrate life.

SOCIAL PROTECTION OF CANCER PATIENTS AND SURVIVORS:

In addition to facing a serious illness, cancer patients and survivors must contend with high cost of treatment, medication and cancer rehabilitation commodities –needed for a lifetime; inadequate insurance coverage; difficulty finding or keeping employment; and ongoing physical and psychological struggles that persist even after active treatment ends. The situation has been compounded further by the COVID-19 pandemic. Major Government directives to curb the spread of COVID-19 have caused challenges such as high cost of transport and in some cases loss of livelihoods. This has caused some patients to miss or abandon treatment altogether and majority are currently unable to afford basic needs including food.

As we celebrate life for cancer survivors and give hope to newly diagnosed patients and their families, we urge the Government to support cancer patients, their caregivers and survivors at a time such as this, through social protection funds meant for the vulnerable members of the society.

Data from the World Health organization shows that people with chronic underlying diseases including cancer are more at risk with respect to COVID-19; due to a weakened immune system. We also urge the Government to prioritize vaccination of cancer survivors against COVID-19, in the upcoming rounds of COVID-19 vaccination.

NATIONAL HOSPITAL INSURANCE FUND (NHIF):

In the recent past, we have sadly learnt that cancer patients are unable to access critical cancer services that are covered under NHIF as they are required to pay two (2) years' worth of premiums in advance, before they can access their cover. This is outright discriminative since most cancer patients, who in most cases are economically vulnerable are unable to afford such premiums upfront. It is also unfair considering that NHIF lacks a comprehensive cancer cover package, which means that even with an updated NHIF card, cancer patients still have to finance their treatment out-of-pocket on top of other expenses that come with a cancer diagnosis.

There are numerous cases of patients who start their treatment journey with NHIF support, only to drop off later, due to lack of enough out-of-pocket funds. We request the Ministry of Health (MoH) and NHIF to convene a multi-stakeholder forum with representation from cancer patients, survivors and People Living With Non-Communicable Diseases to address these issues.

MESSAGE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC:

Cancer services especially screening and early detection services have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the restrictions put in place to limit its spread, intrinsic fear of contracting COVID-19 while seeking these services and the economic impact of COVID-19. This is expected to have profound effects in years to come as many new patients are likely to present and receive a cancer diagnosis late, which adversely affects treatment outcomes.

As we commemorate the National Cancer Survivors' Day 2021, we call upon members of the public to actively seek cancer screening services, which are available in most county health facilities, to improve chances of early detection and better treatment outcomes. We also encourage them to avoid behavioural risk factors such as tobacco use, consumption of unhealthy diets, insufficient physical activity and harmful use of alcohol. We also encourage parents and guardians of 10-year-old girls to present them to government health centers to receive an HPV Vaccine (both first and second dose) which is known to prevent cervical cancer later in life.

CONCLUSION:

Life after cancer should be more than just survival; It is not just the length of life that matters, but also the quality of life. NCS D is a Celebration of Life, but it is also a call to action for further research, more resources, and increased public awareness to improve the lives of cancer survivors. We urge the Government, other stakeholders, communities and even individuals to support cancer, patients, caregivers and survivors overcome their challenges.

-----Ends-----

Notes for Editors.

Who is a cancer Survivor? - a cancer survivor is anyone living with a history of cancer – from the time of diagnosis through the remainder of their life.

Kenya: Commemoration event:

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, KENCO and its members, MoH, the National Cancer Institute of Kenya, NCD Alliance of Kenya and other stakeholders will hold a low-key event at **Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) grounds** from **10.00am to 11.30am** on **Sunday, June 6th 2021**. Attendance will be on **an invite-only basis** to avoid large crowds that would lead to contravening the current COVID-19 guidelines.

About KENCO:

Kenyan Network of Cancer Organizations is the National umbrella body of over 35 cancer civil society organizations that are active in various aspects of cancer control, spread across the country and committed to a unified approach towards cancer control.

www.kenconetwork.org ; Phone: +254799400875; M-Pesa Paybill 779907

Media Contacts: Catherine Wachira- cathywachira@gmail.com; Christine Mugo-Sitati - christine@kenconetwork.org #NCS D2021 #UnitedAgainstCancer.

Christine Mugo-Sitati -4th June 2021