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CONTACT: Sarah Gonzales
Policy Associate
sgonzales@womeningovernment.org
Phone: 202-333-0825 ext. 241

STATES TURN CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES, ADVANCING CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION EFFORTS, ACCORDING TO A NEW REPORT RELEASED TODAY

Washington, DC - January 16, 2009 - A report released today shows that states are making progress in the fight against cervical cancer. As this report indicates there is substantial variation in progress with cervical cancer prevention efforts - especially for underserved populations - across the states. Among the steps that states still need to take to make effective cervical cancer prevention a reality for women at all socioeconomic levels is to increase funding for screening and vaccination programs to ensure access for women who are uninsured or underinsured. These findings are from "A Roadmap for Success: The State of Cervical Cancer Prevention in America 2009," the fifth annual state-by-state comparison report released today by Women In Government, a non-profit, bi-partisan organization representing women state legislators.

States continue their efforts to make cervical cancer a disease of the past. To date, more than half of all states have established statewide Cervical Cancer Elimination Task Forces to coordinate prevention efforts. More than a quarter of states have enacted or introduced HPV and cervical cancer education programs, a dozen have moved to require coverage of HPV testing and 18 states have worked to require that insurers pay for the HPV vaccine.

"Our new report shows that great progress is being made in the fight against cervical cancer," said Mary Brooks Beatty, President of Women In Government. "However, this disease is almost completely preventable and we need to ensure that all women have access to the most appropriate cervical cancer prevention technologies, that socioeconomic status is not a barrier to receiving care, and that women around the world benefit from the tools that have helped make a difference in the battle against cervical cancer in the United States."

The report looked at current data for each state on incidences of cervical cancer and mortality rates; screening rates, including for low-income women; women's access to screening using the most up-to-date technology, rates of uninsured women; and the legislative priority being put on this issue, particularly with the availability of the new HPV vaccine. Key findings in the report include:

States have made tremendous progress in the fight against cervical cancer. Nearly four out of five states - 40 in total - received a grade of Good or Very Good in their efforts to fight cervical cancer. Only 10 states and the District of Columbia received a grade of Fair, the lowest number of Fair grades in the history of the report.

Cervical cancer incidence rates continue to decline. A total of 35 states saw cervical cancer incident rates decline or hold steady.

States continue to work to educate the public about HPV and its link to cervical cancer, as well as the availability and access to screening and vaccination. In 2008, 11 states passed or introduced legislation to create an HPV education program and nine moved to expand access to the HPV vaccine.

This year, three new states joined the ranks of states rated as Very Good in their cervical cancer prevention efforts: Connecticut, Maine, and Michigan. Once again, Minnesota scored the highest in the report with a grade of "Very Good" earning 18 out of 22 possible points. Other top-performing states were: Illinois, Maine, Michigan, North Carolina, and Virginia (all scoring 16 points each) and then Connecticut and Massachusetts, each with scores of 15 points for a "Very Good" rating.

Idaho and South Dakota received the lowest score (each with eight points), followed by Tennessee and Utah, each with nine points for a rating of "Fair."

Despite tremendous accomplishments, much work still needs to be done. Increased educational efforts are needed to ensure that women and girls in the 11-26 year-old age group, recommended for the HPV vaccine by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), do receive the vaccine. Other challenges with the HPV vaccine include ensuring that public and private insurance coverage is available to allow women and girls to receive the vaccine and developing sustainable public health systems to monitor the impact of the vaccine.

"A Roadmap for Success: The State of Cervical Cancer Prevention in America 2009" is the latest step in Women In Government's Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign, which was launched in 2004. The Campaign engages state legislators nationwide in policy and awareness efforts to help eliminate cervical cancer. To date, all 50 states have passed cervical cancer prevention legislation.

About Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. In the U.S., the American Cancer Society estimates that 11,070 women will have been diagnosed with cervical cancer and 3,870 women will have died of the disease in 2008. Cervical cancer is caused by high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection that 3 of 4 adults will have at some time in their lives. Most of these infections go away on their own without treatment. Infections that do not go away on their own can lead to cervical cancer.

A Pap test is the traditional method used for cervical cancer screening. An HPV test identifies women who are infected with high-risk types of HPV that could potentially lead to cervical cancer. Clinical studies suggest that screening with both a Pap test and an HPV test offers women aged 30 and older the best protection against cervical cancer. An HPV vaccine is now FDA-approved for girls and young women ages 9-26. It has been shown to be 100% effective - in women not previously infected - at preventing infection with the two types of HPV that cause approximately 70% of all cervical cancers. HPV vaccination does not protect against all the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer, meaning that women who have been vaccinated still need to be screened to protect against the HPV types that are not covered by the vaccine.

About Women In Government

Women In Government is a national, 501(c)(3), non-profit, bi-partisan organization of women state legislators providing leadership opportunities, networking, expert forums and educational resources to address and resolve complex public policy issues. For more information, visit www.womeningovernment.org.

To access a copy of "A Roadmap for Success: the State of Cervical Cancer Prevention in America 2009," please visit www.womeningovernment.org/prevention/statereport/2009.

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