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Women In Government's Cervical Cancer Campaign Featured at Pan American Health Organization Conference in Guatemala

Guatemala City, Guatemala, July 27, 2006 --- Representatives of Women In Government, a non-profit, bi-partisan organization representing women state legislators in the United States, spoke yesterday at the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) "Partnering for HPV Vaccine Introduction" meeting in Guatemala City, Guatemala. They provided the organization's "Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign" as a model for using public policy to tackle cervical cancer, a major health problem in the Americas. Other speakers included health experts from PAHO, the World Health Organization and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Approximately 80 percent of the world's nearly 500,000 new cases of cervical cancer each year occur in developing nations. PAHO has estimated that more than 37,600 deaths due to cervical cancer occur annually in the Americas and Caribbean. A vaccine for the human papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes cervical cancer, was approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration in June for girls and women aged 9 to 26. Research has shown the vaccine, known as Gardasil, to be effective at preventing infections with the HPV types (16 and 18) that cause approximately 70 percent of all cervical cancers, and with those types (6 and 11) that cause approximately 90 percent of genital warts. Gardasil and another HPV vaccine, called Cervarix, are under regulatory review in countries around the world and may offer a new opportunity to eliminate cervical cancer, the number-two cancer killer of women worldwide.

"Having new technologies, such as HPV vaccines, in the fight against cervical cancer is a critical step toward eliminating this disease worldwide," said Sarah Wells, senior director of public policy for Women In Government. "However, it remains vitally important to establish the proper infrastructure to optimize these technologies' impact. This includes ensuring that women and healthcare providers are educated about HPV, cervical cancer, and the newly available preventive technologies and that all age-appropriate women have access to such technologies. This effort requires the collaboration of a wide range of groups, including policymakers, healthcare providers, public health officials and educators, among others."

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Moreover, global access to the vaccine is paramount to decreasing the burden of this disease. Dr. Jon Andrus, the lead technical advisor at PAHO's Immunization Unit remarked, "The challenge of national immunization programs around the world will be to get this important life-saving technology to those women who need it most. The problem is that 80 percent of women who die of cervical cancer are generally poor and live in underserved areas. They will be the ones to benefit most, even though they will be unable to afford the vaccine unless we all work hard to create affordable prices and access to this vaccine."

In 2004, Women In Government launched the "Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign," which mobilizes U.S. state legislators to educate women about HPV and cervical cancer and to ensure that all age-appropriate women have access to advanced and appropriate prevention technologies, such as HPV testing for screening and now an HPV vaccine. To date, 45 states have introduced legislation or resolutions targeting cervical cancer prevention and 39 states have enacted such measures.

About Cervical Cancer

Worldwide, cervical cancer kills almost a quarter-million women each year. In the United States, the American Cancer Society estimates that 9,710 women will be diagnosed with and approximately 3,700 women will die of cervical cancer this year. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 20 million people are currently infected with HPV, with 6.2 million new infections occurring annually and approximately 80 percent of sexually active women will be infected with HPV by age 50. For 90 percent of infected women, the virus is naturally cleared by the body and becomes undetectable within two years. However, persistent infection with "high-risk" types of HPV is the cause of cervical cancer.

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.

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