



On a Mission

Task force aims to prevent HPV and the cancers it can cause

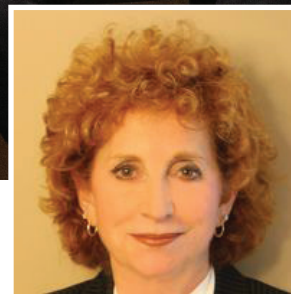
By Suzanne Cohen

Each year, about 13 million Americans — one in four — are infected with HPV or human papillomavirus. A vaccine can safely prevent most HPV infections and six types of related cancer, and the Pittsburgh Business Group on Health is on a mission to raise awareness and increase vaccination rates and accessibility.

Since 1980, PBGH, of which ACSHIC is a member, has helped organizations manage rising health care costs. During the pandemic, members noticed many employees were skipping preventive care, including the HPV vaccine. To address this, the Prevention Task Force-HPV Initiative was created, recognizing the vaccine not only saves lives but also lowers health care costs.

HPV-related cancers include cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal and oral.

“Cancer is devastating for patients, families and employers,” says Diane McClune, PBGH strategic consultant and Task Force chair. “Preventive services are essential for supporting employee health — and protecting the bottom line.”



Diane McClune

A conduit to care

The task force provides communication tools, educational handouts and strategies to employers, pharmacies and health plans, in addition to educating doctors and pharmacists about discussing HPV with patients and encouraging vaccination.

The vaccine is recommended for males and females ages 9 to 26, though it's most effective when given between ages 9 and 12. People aged 27 to 45 may still benefit.

The task force's approach is showing powerful results. McClune says a doctor on the task force trained a national pharmacy's staff on discussing HPV with patients and shared an implementation guide. The chain saw a 60% increase in vaccination rates. Another national retailer showed a 20% increase in vaccinations between 2021 and 2023 after using the guide.

“I never expected that much improvement,” McClune admits. “We're not in it for the credit. We're in it for the mission. The numbers speak for themselves.”

BY THE NUMBERS

38,000 HPV-related cancers in the U.S. (2017-2021), 35,000 of which were preventable

200+ types of HPV, 13 of which can cause cancer

22% of adults aged 18-26 are fully HPV-vaccinated, according to the CDC