Cancer is the feared disease that is becoming unavoidable and a constant battle for scientists and researchers worldwide. In 2017, an estimated 1.7 million new cases of cancer will be diagnosed in the United States and more than 600,000 people will die from the disease. Nearly a third of the most common cancers in the United States can be prevented and every individual has the power to reduce his or her cancer risk with the following three guidelines: regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight and eating a healthy diet.

For over 30 years, AICR has funded research on diet, nutrition and cancer, helping to change our lifestyles and how we think about cancer. Senior Vice President, Deirdre McGinley-Gieser spoke with us at Research Features to share AICR’s mission and talk about the important AICR-funded research that is helping change lives to save lives.

Hi Deirdre! Can you tell us how AICR differs from other organisations focused on cancer research?

AICR is a unique organisation in that we focus solely on how nutrition, physical activity and weight management relate to cancer risk for prevention and survival. We fund research in these areas, undertake regular comprehensive reviews of the global research and provide evidence-based recommendations for individuals to reduce their cancer risk. Our work is different from other organisations in the sense that these are lifestyle factors that we, as individuals, have some control over. Our mission is positive, empowering and has benefits for other chronic diseases in addition to cancer.

What does your role involve as Senior Vice-President for Programs and Strategic Planning at AICR?

As Senior Vice President for Programs and Strategic Planning, I am responsible for the day-to-day work across all our program areas – research, education and communications – and for ensuring that these are aligned with our organisational strategy. This work includes: our research grant program, scientific conference, print and online health information for the general public, external presentations and support for our scientific and health professional partners working in this field.

Since it was founded in 1982, what impact has AICR had on the landscape of cancer?
The results reinforce that following AICR’s Ten Cancer Prevention Recommendations. Over analysing them based on how closely those risk among large numbers of people and These scientists are looking at ongoing Cancer Prevention Recommendations. By making small changes, you can include other more specific changes, such as reducing your consumption of processed meat. The key is to make gradual changes that work for you so that you feel empowered by taking steps to reduce your cancer risk.

Can you tell me more about the Cancer Prevention, Together We Can Initiative? February is ‘Cancer Prevention Month’, and the CUP is an ongoing analysis of global research focused on the intersection of diet, weight and physical activity with cancer prevention and survival. This is the first of our reports to synthesise the evidence base, but the sheer amount and speed of research studies being undertaken worldwide demanded a different process— one that could keep pace with the accumulation of evidence—and this led to the creation of the Continuous Update Project (CUP). We set up one database to house all the scientific evidence, which is now the largest of its kind in the world, developed a robust systematic review process and invited a panel of expert scientists to participate.

Now, the CUP is an ongoing analysis of global research focused on the intersection of diet, weight and physical activity with cancer prevention and survival. The CUP has become a trusted source of information, which is now the largest of its kind in the world, and is widely used by the scientific community as well as health professionals and the general public.

Research now shows that what you eat, how you move and how much you weigh can lower your risk for many cancers. What key advice would you give someone who wanted to make changes in their lifestyle to reduce their cancer risk? We invested in publishing our expert reports in 1997 and 2007. These provided critical evidence for our cancer prevention recommendations. We needed to maintain this evidence base, but the sheer amount and speed of research studies being undertaken worldwide demanded a different process—one that could keep pace with the accumulation of evidence—and this led to the creation of the Continuous Update Project (CUP). We set up one database to house all the scientific evidence, which is now the largest of its kind in the world, developed a robust systematic review process and invited a panel of expert scientists to participate.

The research projects we fund are vital and build up our scientific knowledge incrementally. However, the projects I am really excited about and what I consider to be the most important, are the studies being conducted by independent researchers that are testing AICR’s Ten Cancer Prevention Recommendations. These scientists are looking at ongoing studies of diet, physical activity and disease risk among large numbers of people and analysing them based on how closely those studies follow our Recommendations. Over ten of these studies are now published and the results reinforce that following AICR’s Recommendations does reduce cancer risk.

What is the motivation behind the Continuous Update Project and what impact has it had so far? We invested in publishing our expert reports in 1997 and 2007. These provided critical evidence for our cancer prevention recommendations. We needed to maintain this evidence base, but the sheer amount and speed of research studies being undertaken worldwide demanded a different process—one that could keep pace with the accumulation of evidence—and this led to the creation of the Continuous Update Project (CUP). We set up one database to house all the scientific evidence, which is now the largest of its kind in the world, developed a robust systematic review process and invited a panel of expert scientists to participate.

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