



Milestone (1971)



President Richard Nixon signing the National Cancer Act on December 23, 1971. Courtesy of NCI.

National Cancer Act of 1971

In 1970, the American people made clear their desire for a cure for the second-leading cause of death in the United States.

President Nixon responded during his January 1971 State of the Union address: "I will also ask for an appropriation of an extra \$100 million to launch an intensive campaign to find a cure for cancer, and I will ask later for whatever additional funds can effectively be used. The time has come in America when the same kind of concentrated effort that split the atom and took man to the moon should be turned toward conquering this dread disease. Let us make a total national commitment to achieve this goal."

As part of this national effort, in October 1971, the Army's Fort Detrick, Maryland, biological warfare facility was converted to a cancer research center, eventually becoming the Frederick Cancer Research and Development Center, an internationally recognized center for cancer and AIDS research.

On December 23, 1971, President Nixon followed through on his promise as he signed the National Cancer Act into law, declaring, "I hope in the years ahead we will look back on this action today as the most significant action taken during my Administration."¹

The National Cancer Act (P.L. 92–218), "The War on Cancer," gave the NCI unique autonomy at NIH with special budgetary authority. The Cancer Chemotherapy National Service Center (CCNSC) increased its efforts to acquire new compounds for testing with the awarding of an acquisition and inventory contract responsible for the collection and documentation of test agents.

¹ Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. Cancer Facts & the War on Cancer. 2002.

² Haran C. Vince DeVita: the view from the top. *Cancer World* June–July 2005;38–43.

Video

Vincent DeVita, M.D.
Former Director, NCI

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Saul Schepartz, Ph.D.
Former Deputy Director, DCTD
[high bandwidth](#) | [low bandwidth](#)

Anna Barker, Ph.D.
Deputy Director, NCI
[high bandwidth](#) | [low bandwidth](#)

Transcripts

According to Vincent DeVita, M.D., director of NCI from 1980–1988, the War on Cancer "...did everything it was supposed to do. It supported basic research handsomely. It set up application programs—the EORTC [European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer] and U.S. clinical trials programs. The incidence of cancer in this country started dropping in 1990 and has continued to drop every year since, and so has mortality. And the morbidity from cancer, comparing 1971 to 2005, is like night and day....So, every benchmark of the mandate has been hit."²

