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### DANI WILSON TO JOIN THE CANCER AND ENVIRONMENT NETWORK OF SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA AS STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

***The hiring of senior Pittsburgh-based leadership is an important milestone in the development of this vibrant multi-organization network dedicated to filling an important gap in cancer prevention.***

The Cancer and Environment Network of Southwestern Pennsylvania (CENSWPA) welcomes Dani Wilson as its first Strategic Director. Dani brings over a decade of experience in Pittsburgh-based non-profits, most recently as Executive Director of Cancer Bridges, and a lifetime of commitment to community-level work. She will start her new role on May 2, 2022.

CENSWPA was launched following a groundbreaking symposium held at the Phipps Center in 2019 that illuminated “twin crises” of elevated rates of cancers and multiple sources of environmental carcinogens in the region. Presentations by scientists at the symposium affirmed the importance of smoking cessation and other familiar cancer prevention strategies. It also illuminated a gap which needs more attention: toxic chemicals in air, water, workplaces and consumer products, exposures which are disproportionately high in “environmental justice areas” where more residents are Black, Indigenous and people of color and/or live below the federal poverty line. Participants in the symposium saw both need and opportunity for reversing these trends via collaboration among researchers, environmental and community leaders, cancer-focused organizations and other stakeholders.

“Dani understands that cancer and other chronic diseases are fueled by inequities,” said Jamil Bey, President of UrbanKind, whose organization is represented on the Network leadership team. “Her lived experience, training and persistence in the work of addressing these root causes, and building relationships across multiple dimensions of difference, will serve the Network well.”

CENSWPA now supports projects in the realms of science, education, community programming, and policy, with a premise that action in all of these areas is needed to drive a transition from toxic chemicals to safer alternatives. Over 50 organizations participate in quarterly full-Network meetings; 100 more receive a monthly Cancer and Environment Digest with information on recent relevant research, news, and resources. A monthly speakers’ series provides information about steps people can take to reduce their own exposures and advance upstream solutions. Network leaders are available to support community groups and other organizations as they learn about opportunities to make a difference. A “statement of concern and opportunity” provides a [framework for action](#) by multiple sectors to realize a vision of a region where clean environments generate health and well-being on their way to reversing cancer rates.

“The Network has created a structure for learning, amplifying allied activities, and stimulating collaboration among groups that often are not at the same table,” said Jennifer J. Wasco, Assistant Professor and Director of Professional Development and Continuing Education at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing and a member of the Network leadership team. “We are beyond excited

about the potential of the Network as it matures under Dani's guidance to expand engagement across multiple sectors and unite around strategic priorities."

While at Cancer Bridges, Ms. Wilson oversaw program growth of 800%; doubled the size of the staff; established a new endowment fund of over \$1 million and completed a merger between Our Clubhouse and Cancer Caring Center, creating Cancer Bridges, now the most comprehensive independent cancer support center in Southwestern Pennsylvania. She is particularly proud of her leadership in developing a new strategic plan that centers equity. While at Cancer Bridges, Dani also served on the CENSWPA leadership team.

"Dani is a seasoned, thoughtful and strategic leader with deep experience in advancing the well-being of individuals, families and communities," said Polly Hoppin, a national leader in public health who has served as Senior Advisor to the Network since its inception three years ago. "Her own journey in learning about the contribution of environmental chemicals to cancers, along with her executive-level experience and track record in growing organizations' effectiveness, will be invaluable to the Network its next phase of development."

Ms. Wilson received her Bachelor of Social Work from Chatham University and her Master of Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned the Dean's Scholar Award. In addition to her non-profit work experience, she facilitates Finding Freedom, an engaging workshop that aims to deepen understanding of complicity with white supremacy, how to live consistently into racial justice commitments, and increase actions for racial, economic, and gender justice. Dani is also a Warm Data Lab host with the International Bateson Institute. Warm Data Labs are group processes which highlight interdependency, generate understanding of systemic patterns, and enable new societal responses to complex challenges.

"In addition to her academic training and professional work experience, roles like these amplify Dani's leadership skills," said Michelle Naccarati-Chapkis, Executive Director of Women for a Healthy Environment and also on the Network leadership team. "All of us look forward to continuing to learn from Dani's mix of experiences, skills and relationships as we deepen our work to reverse the epidemic of cancer in our region."

In addition to nurturing current activities, priorities for the next year include expanding staff and leadership team and engaging new partners to round out representation across all the sectors that have a role to play in ensuring healthy environments. Ms. Wilson will also focus on determining how the Network can be most effective in advancing policies that will reduce known risk factors for cancer that are especially prevalent in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

"My participation in the Network over the last three years has been eye-opening and empowering," Ms. Wilson said. "I am thrilled to be able now to devote more time to elevating attention to issues that are often overlooked by cancer prevention programs and which hold such promise for our region."

For more information on the Cancer and Environment Network of Southwestern Pennsylvania, see [www.censwpa.org](http://www.censwpa.org).