

Working with Cancer Control Coalitions to Address Radon



Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas. Breathing in high levels of radon over time can cause lung cancer. For radon professionals, state and tribal radon program staff, and other lung health advocates, it might seem that radon is too often overlooked or minimized in discussions of lung cancer prevention. But there are some promising opportunities available for increasing engagement with the cancer control community to ensure that radon is included among its strategies for reducing lung cancer risk. Working with state, local, territorial, and tribal cancer control coalitions in the development and implementation of cancer control plans is a sustainable way to integrate radon risk reduction into a comprehensive approach to cancer prevention, detection, and treatment.

This document provides information to radon professionals, radon program staff, and other lung health advocates about what a cancer control plan is and recommendations on how they can be involved. The overall goal is to encourage all cancer control plans to include actionable radon risk reduction strategies for all causes of lung cancer.

Background

About every two minutes, someone in the United States is diagnosed with lung cancer. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among both men and women and takes more than 356 lives every day.¹

Radon is the leading environmental cause of lung cancer and the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, after smoking.² As radon naturally decays, it produces radioactive particles that can get stuck in the lungs when people breathe. This exposure can damage lung tissue and over a prolonged period can lead to lung cancer. Not everyone exposed to elevated levels of radon will develop lung cancer, and the amount of time between radon exposure and the onset of the disease could be many years. There are no immediate health symptoms from radon exposure that would make early detection of lung cancer easier. Due to the abundance of evidence, it is important to take steps to reduce the risk of radon exposure to prevent as many cases of lung cancer as possible.

There is no sure way to prevent lung cancer, but there are many ways to help reduce risk. Keys to lung cancer prevention include radon testing and mitigation, eliminating tobacco use, avoiding secondhand smoke, getting screened for lung cancer (if eligible), and reducing exposure to particle pollution.

Lung cancer has one of the lowest five-year survival rates because cases are often diagnosed at later stages, when the disease is less likely to be curable. The national average of people alive five years after a lung cancer diagnosis

is 26.6%, which is a 22% increase over the previous five-year span.¹ Although this shows great improvement, there is still a lot to be done to ensure that fewer people are diagnosed with lung cancer and that those living with the disease live longer.

What are Comprehensive Cancer Control Plans?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program in 1988 to provide funds, guidance, and technical assistance to help cancer coalitions develop and implement effective and sustainable plans to prevent and control cancer. The CDC currently supports cancer coalitions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, seven tribes and tribal organizations, and several U.S. territories.

Cancer coalitions bring together diverse groups of dedicated professionals and advocates to address cancer at the state, local, or tribal level. Cancer coalitions create comprehensive cancer control plans to help lower the number of people affected by cancer. Each plan is tailored to meet the needs of the communities it covers – addressing the risk factors and types of cancers that pose the highest burden. The CDC has defined [six program priorities](#) for each of the cancer coalitions it funds.

Their comprehensive cancer control plans include:

1. Emphasizing primary prevention of cancer.
2. Promoting early detection and treatment of cancer.
3. Supporting cancer survivors and caregivers.
4. Building healthy communities through policy, systems, and environmental approaches.
5. Achieving health equity within cancer prevention and control.
6. Demonstrating outcomes through evaluation

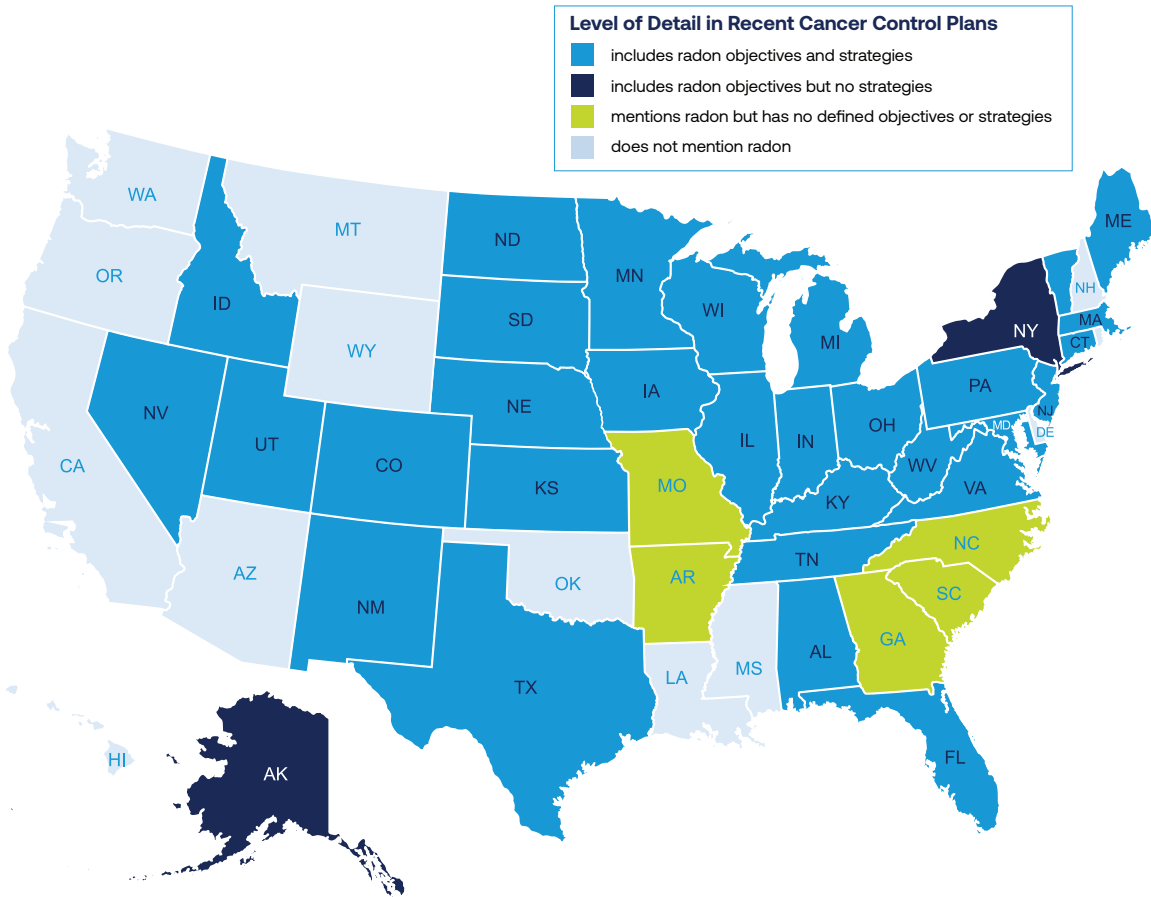
Inclusion of Radon in Cancer Control Plans

Most cancer control plans address lung cancer. However, they often have limited their prevention strategies to tobacco control without also mentioning radon. As of 2024, the most recent cancer control plans among 36 states and tribal organizations include some mention of radon.

When incorporating radon into cancer control plans, it's important to provide measurable objectives and actionable strategies to ensure successful outcomes. Measurable objectives help determine progress, while strategies help to achieve goals. Including both components into plans provide strength and impact to initiatives created.

The map (*Figure 1*) indicates the level of detail that radon is included within recent cancer control plans among specific states:

- Blue: includes radon objectives and strategies.
- Dark Blue: includes radon objectives but no strategies.
- Green: mentions radon but has no defined objectives or strategies.
- Light Blue: does not mention radon.



Visit the CDC’s [Comprehensive Cancer Control Programs](#) to view a complete list of state, territory, and tribal cancer control plans.

Cancer Control Plans Are a Key Strategy within the National Radon Action Plan

The [National Radon Action Plan \(NRAP\)](#) serves as framework to guide nationwide action to eliminate preventable lung cancer from radon in the U.S. by expanding protections for all communities and buildings.

One of the NRAP strategies to achieve these goals is to support state cancer control programs in including radon indicators and risk reduction interventions. The intended outcome is to ensure that all state cancer control programs include radon risk reduction interventions in their primary prevention strategies for lung cancer. To help achieve this goal, the NRAP Leadership Council has developed a [list of evidence-based interventions](#) for radon awareness that cancer control coalitions should consider when creating or updating their cancer control plans.

Incorporating Evidence-based Interventions for Radon into Cancer Control Plans.

The [list of evidence-based interventions](#) is organized according to the NRAP priority goal areas and includes ten measures of success (indicators) and actionable intervention strategies for each indicator.

Recommendations for Taking Action

There are many ways to advocate for radon to be incorporated into cancer control plans.

- Visit the CDC's [National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program](#) to view the cancer control plan within your area.
- Review the plan to determine if and how radon risk reduction is included.
 - Are there specific objectives and strategies around radon?
 - Are they actionable and aligned with the priorities of the state radon program?
 - If not, are there ways to integrate radon activities into existing prevention strategies in the plan?
- Connect with the [cancer coalition within your state](#).
 - Offer to provide radon education to coalition members.
 - Share the [Evidence-based Interventions for Radon](#) document with cancer coalitions.
 - If possible, offer to be involved in drafting the next update of their plan.
- Encourage your community partners to do the same!

Radon Resources:

[Radon Basics](#) – One-hour interactive online program to learn about radon.

[National Radon Action Plan \(NRAP\)](#) – Goals, strategies, and achievements.

[Data reports, webinar recordings and policy backgrounders](#) on the following topics:

- Finding Funding to Fix Radon Problems
- Incorporating Radon Awareness into Comprehensive Cancer Control Plans
- Advancing Health Equity in Radon Risk Reduction
- Strategies for Protecting Tenants from Radon in their Homes
- State Credentialing Programs for Radon Services
- Addressing Radon Risk Reduction in Schools
- Radon and Real Estate

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[State Radon Report Cards](#)

Disclaimer

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References:

1. American Lung Association, State of Lung Cancer 2023 [accessed 11-29-2023]
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Radon and Your Health | Radon | CDC [accessed 6/27/24]