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**NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CANCER CENTER SCIENTISTS SOME OF THE FIRST
TO INVESTIGATE ROLE OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT ON CANCER RISK**

Research focuses on cancer as it may relate to neighborhood lifestyle options and access to care

FREMONT, CA (February 4, 2009) – Scientists at the **Northern California Cancer Center** (NCCC)--www.nccc.org--are conducting groundbreaking studies on the role of the “built environment” on cancer risk and survival. Other researchers have connected aspects of the environment to disease, notably studies showing the correlation between mold in substandard housing and asthma in children, but NCCC scientists are the first to launch broad-based studies examining cancer in relation to the built environment. The built environment is the man-made (as opposed to natural) attributes of surroundings including: the existence and condition of sidewalks, walking trails; the safety of streets for walking, bicycling, children playing, and other forms of exercise; the availability of and access to resources such as health care, healthy food, playgrounds, public transportation; and the destinations in walking distance.

Previous studies have shown that physical attributes of the environment can affect the well-being of residents in neighborhoods. For example, residents of communities that are more amenable to walking or have better parks are more likely to be physically fit and less likely to be overweight or obese. As these body characteristics also have an impact on the risk of developing certain types of cancer, NCCC scientists began inquiring about the relevance of the built environment on cancer risk.

“Even though we’ve known for years that being overweight and not exercising is bad for your health, more and more people are becoming overweight in this country, leading to what has been called ‘the obesity epidemic,’ and it has proven to be difficult to get people to change their behaviors,” says NCCC Research Scientist Scarlett Gomez, Ph.D. “One reason is that it may be difficult for certain people because of impediments in their environment. Through our research, we hope to identify the particular aspects of the environment that are more or less conducive to promoting healthy living and reducing the risk of certain types of cancer.”

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Dr. Gomez and her colleagues are also studying the role of the built environment in relation to cancer outcomes—the treatment, quality of life and survival of patients after their diagnosis. One of her studies is considering the possible effect of neighborhood factors—such as socioeconomic status, medical care, opportunities to access physical activity facilities and other neighborhood services—on the cancer survivorship experience. Through their work, Dr. Gomez and her colleagues are focusing on patients with breast cancer, prostate cancer, and colorectal cancer. The study includes people across many different racial/ethnic groups including African-Americans, Hispanics, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Vietnamese, Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, South Asians, and non-Hispanic whites.

In addition to studying the built environment as it may relate to cancer survival, NCCC, Research Scientist Theresa Keegan, Ph.D., M.S., is studying the role of the built environment as it may relate to how cancer develops. Through work in the California Teachers Study, a long-term, follow-up study of 133,479 female teachers and school administrators, Dr. Keegan and her colleagues are seeking to determine whether or not women who live in California communities that are more walk-able are less likely to develop breast cancer. Examples of walk-able communities are those that have a mix of residences and businesses, a greater percentage of residents who bike to work and a lower percentage of residents who drive.

According to Drs. Gomez and Keegan, the type of information uncovered through studies like these can be used by public health planners, who might work together with urban and policy planners to design communities that can help to reduce the risk of cancer and enhance wellness among their residents.

For more information, please visit www.nccc.org or contact Serena Espinosa at 510-608-5160 or serena.espinosa@nccc.org.

About the Northern California Cancer Center:

The Northern California Cancer Center (www.nccc.org) is a nationally recognized leader in researching the causes of cancer and improving the prevention and detection of cancer. Its community programs improve the quality of life for individuals living with cancer. As an independent 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization with a \$14 million operating budget, the Northern California Cancer Center researches who gets cancer and why and has been working with scientists, educators, patients, clinicians, and community leaders since 1974.

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