

# The Truth About the Biden Cancer Initiative

Allegations against the nonprofit are fundamentally misleading.

November 18, 2020 By [Caroline Tien](#)

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Accusations circulating in certain media outlets that the Biden Cancer Initiative raised money for salaries and conferences but did not dispense grants are rooted in a basic misunderstanding of the organization's purpose, asserts [The Cancer Letter](#), an independent weekly magazine. The fact-checking website Snopes has also labeled the reporting [misleading](#).

The controversy kicked off with an article [the New York Post](#) published based on an analysis of the nonprofit's financial documents. Headlined "Tax filings reveal Biden cancer charity spent millions on salaries, zero on research," it [attracted the attention](#) of Donald Trump, his former campaign manager Corey Lewandowski and Fox News anchors Laura Ingraham and Sean Hannity. The story was also shared by the Russian propaganda publication RT.

It's true that the initiative did not dispense grants in its two-year existence.

But that's because it was never meant to.

The Biden Cancer Initiative sought to put an end to the siloing of cancer research. It worked to support the work of the entirely different and much larger Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot, a National Cancer Institute program that President-elect Joe Biden spearheaded as vice president that continues to fund grants worth many millions of dollars each year. (The Moonshot program is named after Joe Biden's son, who died of brain cancer in 2015.)

Indeed, the Cancer Letter suggests the similar names of the two programs may have led reporter Isabel Vincent to conflate the nonprofit Biden Cancer Initiative with the ongoing, federal Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot effort.

## A Catalyst for Change

The Biden Cancer Initiative was founded in June 2017. Biden and his wife, Jill, [resigned as cochairs](#) in April 2019 to avoid a conflict of interest; the initiative halted operations in July 2019.

Biden made clear at the outset that the organization was never intended to provide funding to

individuals, organizations or institutions. “It’s not so much about raising money or philanthropy—though there will be some of that—but it’s more about keeping these guys cooperating and changing the culture,” Biden said of the initiative, according to the Cancer Letter.

The distinction is clearly addressed in the [FAQ](#) section on the Biden Initiative website.

Q: Is the Biden Cancer Initiative a grant-giving organization?

No. The Biden Cancer Initiative will largely not be a grant-giving organization and will accomplish its mission through convening, connecting partners, catalyzing new actions, and providing venues to discuss progress and develop new actions and collaborations.

The Biden Initiative had begun to make progress toward those goals before it closed its doors for good. It created the Oncology Clinical Trial Information Commons, a collaboration among nine organizations to make clinical trial information more available and accessible to cancer patients. The Biden Cancer Initiative also developed nearly 60 partnerships with pharmaceutical companies, health care firms, charities and others, which pledged more than [\\$400 million](#) to improve cancer treatment around the world.

### The Numbers at the Heart of the Controversy

During fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the organization received more than \$4 million dollars in funding, of which \$3,070,301—or 63.8%—went toward paying employee salaries and \$799,671 was spent on organizing and holding events, such as conferences.

As for the New York Post article’s suggestion that Biden Cancer Initiative employees were potentially overpaid, the Cancer Letter reports that the Biden Initiative’s CEO, Gregory Simon, earned a salary similar to that of CEOs of other health care nonprofits. Simon earned \$654,389 during his tenure as CEO, or an average of \$327,194 per year. For comparison, the CEO of the Livestrong Foundation earned \$348,609, and the president of the Prevent Cancer Foundation earned \$352,567 in 2018.

### The Future of a Moonshot

In January 2016, in his final State of the Union address, President Barack Obama announced the Cancer Moonshot, an ambitious program to accelerate cancer cures, naming Vice President Joe Biden to run the task force to turn it into a reality. Biden delivered his report in October, and in December 2016, Congress passed the 21st Century Cures Act on a bipartisan basis. The law authorized \$1.8 billion over seven years for the Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot.

While the transition team for President-elect Joe Biden has not yet released specific plans related to cancer research, it is a reasonable bet that advancing that research will be a priority of the upcoming administration. As the Cancer Letter put it last week, “For the first time in U.S. history, the White House will soon be occupied by a president who has demonstrated a deep

understanding of cancer research.”

To read about how Biden promised to cure cancer on the campaign trail, [click here](#); to read about his press secretary T.J. Ducklo’s cancer journey, [click here](#). And to read about the medical journal The Lancet Oncology endorsement of Biden, [click here](#).

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