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Partners in Progress: Informing the Science and Practice of Health Communication Through National Surveillance

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The Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) was conceived during a risk communication conference in 1997, wherein attendees representing the fields of psychology, public health, health education, health behavior, journalism, and medicine encouraged the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to develop a health and cancer communication-specific population survey to track trends in American adults' access to, need for, and use of cancer information. This call for the development of a national cancer communication survey coincided with NCI's designation of an Extraordinary Opportunity in Cancer Communication, which allowed the NCI to support scientific research to advance the study of cancer communication. A key component of this initiative was the HINTS. Building upon the interdisciplinary recommendations of the 1997 risk communication conference, NCI developed a national survey to assess trends in health information usage over time and cancer-related communication, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. The NCI fielded the first HINTS in 2002 and 2003, surveying 6,369 adult Americans. Subsequent surveys followed in 2005 (5,586 Americans surveyed) and 2008 (7,674 Americans surveyed).

For each survey administration, a HINTS Data Users Conference is held to encourage HINTS data users to share their research findings, to build the research community, and to gather input for future survey administrations. The third HINTS Data Users Conference was held in Silver Spring, MD, in September 2009. The conference theme, "Partners in Progress," emphasized the collaborative nature of the HINTS program. The conference included a series of oral presentations focused on the following themes: *Partners, Populations, and Progress; Survey Methodology; Health Communication; and Media and Health Communication*. This special issue of the *Journal of Health Communication* is

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organized according to these thematic tracks and builds upon the oral presentations, poster presentations, and group discussions of the conference.

The articles included in this issue describe key findings from HINTS research using data from the three HINTS data sets to explore disparities in health communication, information access, or use of communication technologies; examine health surveillance methodology including topics such as response rates, mode effects, scale development, and sampling design; examine patient and healthcare provider communication, perceptions of quality of healthcare, the impact of communication technology on the clinical encounter, and patient centered communication; and examine the impact of media and the Internet on information seeking and cancer-related knowledge as well as exploration of group differences in use of health communication technology.

Tracking the cancer-related information needs, experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors of the American public is critical to NCI's strategic objectives in service of the NCI mission to reduce the cancer burden through coordinated efforts to advance fundamental cancer knowledge across the continuum from discovery to delivery. This imperative requires multidisciplinary and collaborative partnerships, which have been instrumental to the success of the HINTS program. We are grateful to the HINTS community of data and results users, and enthusiastically anticipate continued collaboration and partnership as the driving force for progress in the HINTS program. We hope that the research featured in this special issue will fortify the evidence base for developing effective cancer communication strategies and inform future work in communication science and cancer prevention and control.

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