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**PRESS RELEASE**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
February 24, 2020

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
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## **Heart Disease Was the Leading Cause of Death in NH in 2018, Surpassing Cancer for the First Time in a Decade**

**Concord, NH** – More than 2,600 New Hampshire residents died from heart disease in 2018, according to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), making it the leading cause of death in New Hampshire. That marks the first time in over a decade that heart disease surpassed cancer as the leading cause of death.

February is American Heart Month, making it an ideal time to think about heart health and to learn the major risk factors for preventing heart disease. The focus of this year's American Heart Month is on high blood pressure, a major risk factor for developing heart disease. One of three adults in the United States has high blood pressure, which may have no symptoms and is known as the silent killer.

“Many people do not know they have high blood pressure,” said Dr. Sai Cherala, the DHHS Bureau Chief of Population Health and Community Services. “Be sure to have your blood pressure checked at your physician’s office, a pharmacy, or at home. If your blood pressure is too high, you can take steps to control it with the guidance of your health care provider.”

Nationally, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women. About 647,000 Americans die from heart disease each year, accounting for one in every four deaths. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking are major risk factors for heart disease. About half of Americans have at least one of these three risk factors. Other factors that increase the risk for heart disease include diabetes, obesity, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and excessive alcohol use.

People can take steps to lower their risk of developing heart disease. Lifestyle changes and medications prescribed by a health care provider will help control blood pressure as well as other risk factors for heart disease. Examples of lifestyle changes include eating a healthy diet that is low in salt, total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; taking a brisk 10-minute walk 3 times a day 5 days a week; and not smoking.

DHHS has a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with the overall goal to help people prevent and control high blood pressure and diabetes. Specific strategies to achieve this goal in New Hampshire include supporting self-measured blood pressure monitoring programs and working with health care providers to refer at-risk patients to community programs designed to address risk factors for high blood pressure and heart disease.

For more information on heart disease, including how to reduce risk through lifestyle changes and by managing medical conditions, please visit <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdpc/hdsp.htm>.

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