

The Virgin Islands Consortium

American Cancer Society Suspends USVI Operations

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The American Cancer Society (ACS) has made the difficult decision to suspend its operations in the US Virgin Islands (USVI), according to a release ACS issued late Monday.

Traditionally, ACS USVI has been a community-led voluntary organization supported by a small staff presence. Funds raised in the USVI stayed in the USVI and directly supported patient needs in the territory. However, income from its primary community fundraiser, Relay For Life, has been declining for a number of years, while the demand for direct financial assistance to patients has increased, resulting in a drawing down of the locally restricted funds, ACS said.

Although operations were restructured at the end of August 2017 to optimize patient services and maximize fundraising capabilities, the devastation suffered in the territory from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017 compounded the already tight situation, resulting in operational unsustainability at this time, ACS added.

The nonprofit said it has always been sensitive to the pulse of the community and recognizes that the territory's priority must be on rebuilding. After careful consideration, driven by discussions with local volunteers, the American Cancer Society has decided to put its USVI operations on hiatus, given the lack of appetite for cancer-specific fundraising in the territory to a level sufficient to drive operations. ACS said will continue to monitor the situation and will consider resuming local operations in the future.

According to the release, ACS has been a fiscally responsible and well governed nonprofit partner. Even after the recent hurricanes and with depleting funds, ACS said it continued to assist cancer patients through its "Direct Patient Financial Assistant Program" and via the grant provided to Cancer Support VI. Despite suspension of its physical operations, ACS will honor its promise that remaining mission funds will stay in the USVI, restricted to patient aid and assistance, via its partnership with Cancer Support VI, according to the release.

The American Cancer Society will also continue to be available to all residents facing a cancer diagnosis 24 hours a day, seven days a week through its toll-free support line, 1.800.227.2345, and www.cancer.org to provide personalized information, guidance and resources. Additionally, the nonprofit said its work in areas like research and public policy will continue to benefit the people of the USVI. Active cancer patients in the territory can continue to apply for direct financial assistance through the ACS grant to Cancer Support VI by calling 340.715.5806.

ACS said it has been the recipient of the generosity, volunteerism and love of individuals, businesses, organizations and the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands over the years. It said every dollar and in-kind service has been put to good use to assist those struggling with a cancer diagnosis.

"We thank our tireless and passionate volunteers (event, office and mission), as well as members of the Volunteer Leadership Board. We thank all our Relay for Life teams, Making Strides Against Breast Cancer organizers, 3rd party fund raisers, sponsors and patrons. We are confident that we are making the most fiscally responsible decision we can at this difficult time, to preserve limited funds for patients in need. The American Cancer Society will continue to be a partner of integrity and accountability," the release concluded.