



Ensuring Access to Breast and Cervical Cancer Screenings

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women. This year in the US, breast cancer is expected to be diagnosed in more than 232,000 women, and take 40,000 lives. For cervical cancer, approximately 12,000 new cases will be diagnosed and more than 4,000 women will lose their lives this year. Many of these deaths from breast and cervical cancers could be avoided if cancer screening rates increased among women at risk.

Screening mammography reduces breast cancer mortality rates and could save thousands of lives each year. Even more striking, cervical cancer screenings using the Pap test can actually prevent cancer altogether by detecting precancerous lesions. In fact, screenings have delivered a steady decline in both incidence and mortality rates for cervical cancer over the past several decades. Yet despite increased awareness of the importance of early detection for these cancers, millions of underinsured and uninsured women across the country still do not have access to these lifesaving screenings.

Screening Saves Lives

Evidence shows that underinsured and uninsured women have lower screening rates for mammograms and Pap tests, are more likely to begin screenings later in life, have longer intervals between screenings, and have a harder time accessing timely treatment if their screening result is positive. As a result, they face later-stage cancer diagnoses more often, when treatment options are limited and survival rates are lowest.

- When detected at a localized stage, the 5-year survival rate for breast cancer is 99 percent. When detected at a later stage, after the cancer has spread, the 5-year survival rate drops to 24 percent.
- The 5-year survival rate for patients diagnosed with localized cervical cancer is 91 percent. However, cervical cancer is detected at an early stage more often in white women (49 percent) than in African American women (39 percent) and more often in women younger than 50 (59 percent) than in women 50 and older (33 percent).



Through passage of the Affordable Care Act, many women have gained new access to health insurance and lifesaving screening services. However, programs such as the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) remain key to making sure the most vulnerable women are able to receive screening services.

National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program

One important way at risk women can access breast and cervical cancer screening is through the NBCCEDP. Established by Congress in 1990 the NBCCEDP program seeks to reduce breast and cervical cancer deaths among medically underserved women. This program is administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and brings lifesaving breast and cervical cancer screening, information, and follow up services to women at highest risk – especially poor, low-income, racial and ethnic minority women.

Now available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, 5 US territories, and 11 American Indian/Alaska Native organizations, NBCCEDP has provided over 11 million screening exams to more than 4 million women, detecting more than 62,000 breast cancers, 3,400 cervical cancers and 163,000 premalignant cervical lesions.

Unfortunately, deep spending cuts over the past 5 years have made federal funding for the NBCCEDP woefully inadequate. These cuts have come on top of widespread spending reductions at the state level. These cuts combined have resulted in thousands of women who are unable to gain access to breast and cervical screening, resulting in fewer cancers detected early.

An estimated 40,000 women in America will lose their battle with breast cancer this year. Lawmakers have a duty to protect the NBCCEDP and make sure women don't have to skip the screenings they need to save their lives. Recognizing that NBCCEDP is essential to the fight against cancer, ACS CAN and its advocates are working tirelessly to boost both federal and state funding that supports NBCCEDP.

Making Strides Against Breast Cancer – Walk for a World Without Breast Cancer

Another way ACS CAN supports breast cancer advocacy, including access to screenings and more funding for research, is through the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer - the largest network of breast cancer events nationwide. Through a partnership with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Making Strides Against Breast Cancer is able to bring the breast cancer community together on advocacy issues.

Since 2005, Making Strides Against Breast Cancer has inspired countless participants to take action through advocacy. In the most recent years, thousands of Making Strides participants from across the country have signed petitions urging lawmakers to "Put the Power of the Purse" behind cancer research funding and prevention to save lives. ACS CAN introduced a special premium "Power or the Purse" pin as a symbol of awareness, an item reflecting both the Power of the Purse that Congress holds as well as the power that Making Strides participants hold in their hands to make a difference.

ACS CAN's web site (www.acscan.org) offers advocates the opportunity to learn more about these issues and makes it easy to take action by reaching out to their lawmakers. Visitors can sign and send online petitions to elected officials with the click of a button, asking that they do their part to secure funding for cancer research.

Moving Forward

With the help and support of grassroots advocates, health care professionals and researchers, cancer survivors, and other collaborators, ACS CAN will continue to promote policies and laws that increase funding for programs that help women prevent, detect, and treat breast and cervical cancer. ACS CAN will continue the fight to make sure that no woman is left exposed.

Contributions or gifts to the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Inc. are not tax deductible.

