



# Ensuring Access to Breast and Cervical Cancer Screenings

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women. Each year in the US, breast cancer is diagnosed in more than 207,000 women, and it takes 40,000 lives. For cervical cancer, about 12,000 new cases are diagnosed and more than 4,000 women lose their lives each year. Many of these deaths from breast and cervical cancers could be avoided if cancer screening rates increased among women at risk.

Screening mammography can actually reduce breast cancer mortality rates as much as 30%, saving more than 12,000 lives each year. Even more striking, cervical cancer screenings using the Pap test can actually prevent cancer altogether by detecting precancerous lesions. In fact, cervical screenings have delivered a steady decline in both incidence and mortality rates for cervical cancer over the past several decades. Despite increased awareness of the importance of early detection for these cancers, millions of underinsured and uninsured women across the country 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 98%. When detected at a later stage, after the cancer has spread, the 5-year survival rate drops to only 23%.
- The 5-year survival rate for patients diagnosed with localized cervical cancer is 92%. But cervical cancer is detected at an early stage more often in white women (52%) than in African American women (44%) and more often in women younger than 50 (62%) than in women 50 and older (37%).

At the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), we are committed to ensuring that all women have the opportunity to get these potentially lifesaving cancer screenings.

## *National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program: Celebrating 20 years*

Congress established the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) in 1990 to reduce breast and cervical cancer deaths among medically underserved women. This program, administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 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, four US territories, and 13 American Indian/Alaska Native organizations, NBCCEDP has provided more than 8 million screening exams to more than 3 million women, detecting more than 37,000 breast cancers, which translates into over 100,000 life years saved.

## *Increasing the One in Five Odds*

Despite this proven program's success, NBCCEDP's federal funding is woefully inadequate and has failed to keep pace with inflation. **This means that fewer than one in five eligible women currently receive screenings through NBCCEDP.**

In 2007, President Bush signed the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program Reauthorization

Act, acknowledging the success of NBCCEDP and setting a funding target of \$275 million annually for five years. But Congress approved only \$205 million for NBCCEDP in Fiscal Year 2009 and only \$215 million in Fiscal Year 2010.

Recognizing that failure to achieve these funding levels will leave millions of women exposed to cancer diagnoses at a later stage where survival is less likely, ACS CAN and its advocates are working tirelessly to boost both federal and state funding that supports NBCCEDP.

We are urging Congress to increase NBCCEDP funding to \$255 million total program funding now, and continue funding increases in future years to sustain and build the program to serve more women. Here is how:

- Through the American Cancer Society's "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" events, nationwide awareness about the need for increased funding has been brought to the forefront and inspired countless participants to take action. Striders from across the country have signed thousands of "We Can Change the Odds" petitions to targeted U.S. Senators, urging them to increase NBCCEDP funding levels.
- ACS CAN introduced a special "Pink Lady" awareness pin at Strides events, an item reflecting the small fraction of women who are able to get screened through the NBCCEDP.
- Volunteers also take part in an activity at Strides "kickoff" breakfasts in which only one in every six individuals' nametags reflect a pink lady, representing the less than 1 in 5 women able to be screened through the NBCCEDP. All of the participants without a pink lady on their nametag are asked to stand and look around. They represent the women in America who will not get their yearly screening and are at risk to have their breast or cervical cancer diagnosed at a later stage.

ACS CAN is also working to address other access barriers to getting cancer screening, such as passing legislation that would eliminate cost-sharing for mammography and other cancer screenings in Medicare.

ACS CAN's web site ([www.acscan.org](http://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 make sure the NBCCEDP is funded adequately to cover those women who need these screenings the most. Advocates can also read others' stories about trying to get breast and cervical screening tests without health care insurance, or share their own experiences.

### ***Moving Forward***

Thanks in large part to the combined efforts of Making Strides Against Breast Cancer and ACS CAN grassroots advocates across the nation, after several years of budget cuts, the NBCCEDP received a \$10 million increase in funding for 2010. But our fight isn't over yet.

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 because contributions to ACS CAN support our citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts.