

Preventing Chronic Diseases: Investing Wisely in Health

Screening to Prevent Cancer Deaths

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Human Costs of Cancer

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in America, claiming the lives of more than half a million people every year. Many cancer deaths could be avoided if more people were screened for cancer.

Screening for colorectal, breast, and cervical cancers can reduce illness and death through early detection of cancers and precancers. Yet many adults are not getting regular life-saving screenings as recommended. In 2002, these three cancers accounted for nearly a fifth of all U.S. cancer deaths.

Colorectal Cancer

- An estimated 56,000* people died of colorectal cancer in 2002.
- Nearly 150,000* new cases were diagnosed.
- Rates of colorectal cancer death are higher for African Americans than for any racial or ethnic group in the nation.

Breast Cancer

- An estimated 40,000* women died of breast cancer in 2002.
- More than 200,000* new cases were diagnosed.
- Women with low incomes and limited education are more likely than other women to have their breast cancer diagnosed at a later stage and to die of their cancer.

Cervical Cancer

- An estimated 4,000* women died of cervical cancer in 2002.
- About 13,000* new cases were diagnosed.
- Hispanic women are more likely than other women to develop cervical cancer. They also are less likely to have health insurance and get regular Pap tests.

Financial Costs of Cancer

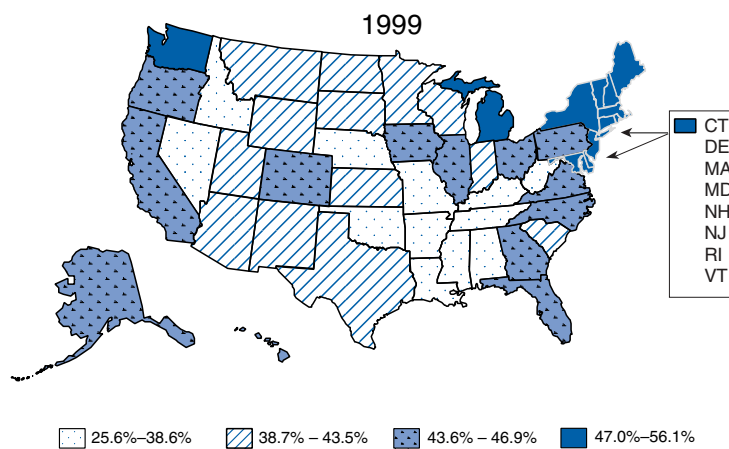
In 2002, cancers cost this country over \$170 billion overall,[†] which includes more than \$110 billion for lost productivity and over \$60 billion for direct medical costs. Each year,

- Colorectal cancer treatment costs about \$6.5 billion.
- Breast cancer treatment costs nearly \$7 billion.
- Cervical cancer treatment costs about \$2 billion.

*Estimates from the American Cancer Society.

†Estimates from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Screening for Colorectal Cancer Lags Far Behind Screening for Other Cancers*



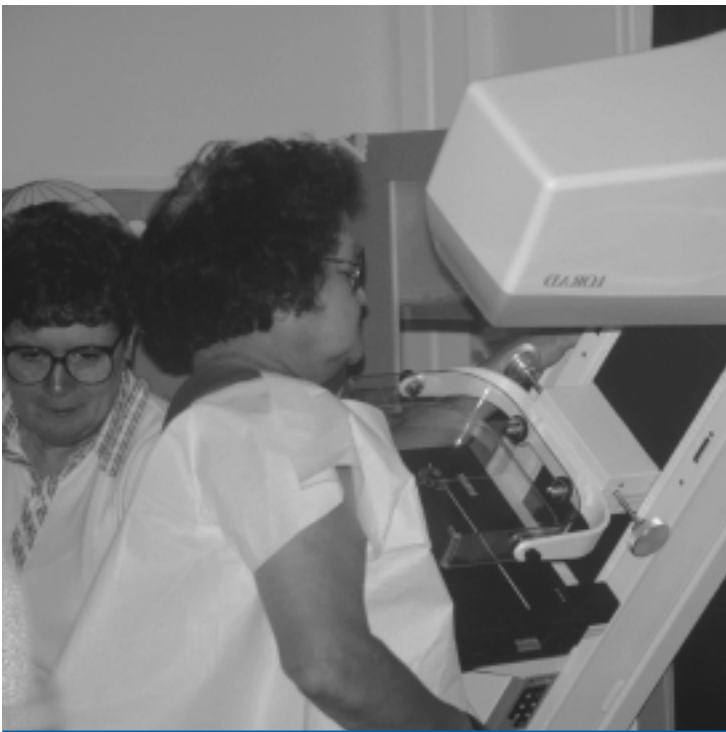
* Percentage of adults 50 or older who had a fecal occult blood test within the previous year or a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy within the previous 5 years, as recommended.

Source: CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Cancer Screening Saves Lives

Early detection could substantially reduce the billions of dollars spent on cancer treatment each year. Not only does cancer screening save lives by detecting breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers early; it also is the first step in preventing many cases of colorectal and cervical cancers from ever developing:

- Screening for colorectal cancer, as recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, can reduce the number of people who die of this disease by at least 30%.
- Regular mammograms can dramatically reduce a woman's risk for dying of breast cancer. A mammogram every 1-2 years can reduce this risk by about 16% for women 40 and older.
- Cervical cancer can be prevented by using the Pap test to detect precancerous lesions so they can be treated before cancer develops. Researchers in many countries found that rates of cervical cancer death dropped by 20%–60% after screening programs began.



State Programs in Action

Vermont Women With Special Needs Have Access to Vital Cancer Screenings

The Vermont Department of Health's Ladies First program offers free mammograms and Pap tests to eligible women across the state. One of the program's goals is to reach out to women with special needs. For example, Ladies First offers TDD phone assistance for women who are hearing-impaired and provides materials in alternative formats such as large type and Braille for women with impaired vision. The program has been a big help to Natalie, who is blind. The staff helped her fill out the necessary forms to get screened for breast and cervical cancer. They then gave Natalie an audiotape of all available education materials on breast and cervical cancer.

Ladies First also addresses the special needs of women in wheelchairs, who often do not get a thorough exam because the typical exam table is too high and is not wheelchair-accessible. When there is an inability to manually lift the woman onto the table, the chance to find cancer early is missed and critical early treatment is delayed. To overcome these barriers, Ladies First recently purchased wheelchair-accessible exam tables for 10 hospitals and one correctional facility.

Ladies First and the hard work of its outreach staff ensure that women like Natalie have access to vital health information and cancer screening services. Since its launch in 1995, the program has provided cancer screening and diagnostic services to 6,000 Vermont women. As a result, 70 cancers have been detected, most in the earliest, most treatable stage.



Cancer Screening: A Good Investment

Health economists generally agree that if an intervention can save 1 year of life for less than \$50,000, it is cost-effective. So in economic terms, screening for colorectal, breast, and cervical cancers is cost-effective, with costs falling far below the \$50,000 threshold. In human terms, the benefits of a longer life are priceless:

- Screening for colorectal cancer extends life at a cost of \$9,424 to \$26,228 per year of life saved.
- Mammography every 2 years extends life for women aged 50–79 at a cost of \$17,269 per year of life saved.
- Pap screening every 3 years extends life at a cost of \$4,535 per year of life saved.

Effective Strategies

The National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) has provided more than 3.5 million screening tests for breast and cervical cancer to nearly 1.5 million low-income women. This program helps to ensure underserved women have access to screening services that can detect cancer early and reduce illness and death. Health departments in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the 6 U.S. territories, and 14 American Indian/Alaska Native organizations participate in the NBCCEDP. The program continues to establish, expand, and improve community-based screening and diagnostic services. It also helps women with cancer diagnoses receive needed treatment.

“Screen for Life” is a successful multimedia campaign that urges men and women 50 and older to be screened for colorectal cancer. The campaign was created by CDC and its federal partner, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Since 1999, 29 states have developed local campaign materials, and more than 1 billion people have seen the materials and gotten the “Screen for Life” message.

Hope for the Future

Many people in America are alive and healthy today because they were screened for cancer. Cervical cancer deaths remain low, in part, because of high screening rates: 87% of U.S. women 18 and older reported in 2000 that they had had a Pap test, up from 84% in 1990. Rates of mammography and sigmoidoscopy continue to increase:

- About 76% of women 40 and older reported in 2000 that they had had a mammogram in the previous 2 years, compared with 58% in 1990.
- Almost 34% of men and women 50 and older reported in 2000 that they had ever had a sigmoidoscopy, compared with 30% in 1997.

Cancer screening reduces the cost of cancer and, most importantly, saves lives. Even small increases in screening rates will reduce cancer costs, illness, and deaths.

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