

Secretary Sebelius statement for 2011 National Breast Cancer Awareness Month



For more than 25 years, National Breast Cancer Awareness Month has been a time to reaffirm our commitment to fighting breast cancer and to remind ourselves of the importance of prevention and early detection. Breast cancer remains one of the most frequently diagnosed cancers among American women and despite remarkable advances in treatment and prevention, it remains the second leading cause of cancer death. This year alone, it is estimated that more than 230,000 U.S. women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and nearly 40,000 will die of the disease.

Regular mammography screening can help lower breast cancer mortality by finding breast cancer early, when the chance of successful treatment is best. If 90 percent of women 40 and older received breast cancer screening, 3,700 lives would be saved each year. Costs, even moderate co-pays, deter many patients from receiving these important screenings. Under the Affordable Care Act, women's preventive health care – such as mammograms and screenings for cervical cancer – is covered with no co-pays or other out-of-pocket costs.

In addition to regular mammography screening, there are steps that women can take that may help reduce their risk of developing breast cancer. Women should talk with their doctor about their personal risk for breast cancer, when to start having mammograms, and how often to have them. Women should also try to maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, and reduce their intake of alcohol.

If a woman is found to be at increased risk of breast cancer because of her medical history or a known high-risk gene mutation, she should talk with her doctor to decide what her best options are to reduce breast cancer risk might be. With the release of new Women's Preventive Services Guidelines, a well-woman visit is available to women to have an opportunity to discuss her health care needs with her medical provider – at no additional cost to her.

The Affordable Care Act is also helping women who are going or have gone through costly breast cancer treatment. Beginning in 2014, it will be illegal for insurance companies to discriminate against anyone with a pre-existing condition. In the past, insurance companies could deny coverage to women due to pre-existing conditions such as breast cancer, and if coverage was attained, insurance companies set lifetime and annual limits on what the companies would spend for benefits. We have done away with lifetime limits, offering women the peace of mind that their health insurance will be available when women need it most. We are also phasing out the use of annual dollar limits over the next three years until 2014 when the Affordable Care Act bans them for most plans.

These changes are making real differences in the lives of American women and families. Prevention, coupled with continued research, will help save more lives and improve the quality of life for all of us touched by breast cancer.

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State Lawmakers Protect Screening Program in State Budget

Madison, Wis.—October 4, 2011—Thousands of Wisconsin women who might otherwise be unable to afford it will receive their doctor recommended mammogram this year thanks to the Wisconsin Well Woman Program. Well Woman provides uninsured or underinsured low-income women access to the potentially life-saving screening. One such beneficiary is Wendy Zetting of Milwaukee. Zetting, 48, was laid off from her job of 21 years in 2009 and when she could no longer afford her COBRA insurance coverage, she looked to Well Woman to fill the gaps.

“It was just such a relief to know even though I was uninsured I was still going to get my mammogram,” said Zetting, who has had two biopsies and a lumpectomy for a benign lump during the last eight years. “There’s a world of difference between hoping you’re healthy and knowing you are.”

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among Wisconsin women. Of the estimated 4,430 women who will be diagnosed in the state this year, 690 will die from the disease. Early stage breast cancer is 98 percent survivable, yet just 27 percent of late-stage breast cancer patients survive their disease.

“Ensuring all Wisconsin women—no matter what their insurance status—have access to age-appropriate screening is a smart way to save lives and save dollars,” said Allison Miller, Wisconsin Government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society. The cost of a mammogram averages around \$150, while the cost to treat stage IV breast cancer can easily exceed \$50,000. According to the National Cancer Institute, breast cancer treatment costs totaled \$16.5 billion nationwide in 2010.

Wisconsin’s Well Woman Program will continue to receive \$2.2 million in the state funding under the 2011-2013 state budget—the only public health program to be spared a 10 percent reduction.

“Mammograms are one of the most successful and cost effective early detection tools in the fight against cancer,” said Miller. “Thanks to the leadership of Governor Walker and Joint Committee of Finance co-chairs Senator Alberta Darling and Representative Robin Vos, the Legislature protected Well Woman funding and recognized the program’s importance to Wisconsin women, their families and their loved ones.”

In 2009, the most recent year for which data is available, Well Woman served nearly 10,000 women in need.



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