About the Program

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) provides public education, free and low-cost breast and cervical cancer screenings, and diagnostic services to low-income, uninsured, and underserved women.

The National Program

To aid in the fight against breast and cervical cancer, Congress passed the Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act of 1990, which guided CDC in creating NBCCEDP. In 2009, NBCCEDP provided $186 million in funding to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, five U.S. territories, and 12 American Indian/Alaska Native tribes or tribal organizations. Services included in the program are:

- Public education
- Clinical breast examinations
- Mammograms
- Pap tests
- Pelvic examinations
- Diagnostic testing, if results are abnormal
- Referrals to treatment

In 2000, Congress passed the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act to give states the option of offering women in NBCCEDP access to treatment through a special Medicaid option program. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have approved this Medicaid option. In 2001, passage of the Native American Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Technical Amendment Act by Congress expanded this option to provide access to treatment to American Indians and Alaska Natives through the Indian Health Service or a tribal organization.

Program Eligibility

Federal guidelines establish eligibility to uninsured and underinsured women at or below 250% of federal poverty level, ages 40–64 for breast cancer screening, and 18–64 for cervical cancer screening. An estimated 8%–11% of U.S. women of screening age are eligible to receive NBCCEDP services.

The Burden of Breast and Cervical Cancer

Breast and cervical cancers claim the lives of thousands of women each year. Breast cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in the United States (after skin cancer) and the second most common cause of cancer death (after lung cancer) among U.S. women.[1] Each year, approximately 190,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and 40,000 women die from the disease.[1] More than $8.1 billion per year (in 2004 dollars) is spent in the United States on the treatment of breast cancer.

About the Program

Cervical cancer was once the leading cause of death for women in the United States. However, during the past 50 years, incidence (the number of new cases each year) and mortality (the number of deaths each year) from cervical cancer have declined 75%, largely because of the widespread use of the Papanicolaou (Pap) test to detect cervical abnormalities. Each year, approximately 12,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 4,000 women die from the disease.[1] It is estimated that more than $2 billion (in 2000 dollars) is spent on the treatment of cervical cancer per year in the U.S.

The Benefits of Screening

Mammography is the best available method to detect breast cancer in its earliest, most treatable form. Studies show that early detection of breast cancer can save lives. Mammography, performed every one to two years for women aged 40 years or older, can reduce mortality by approximately 20%–25% over 10 years.

Cervical cancer is highly preventable if precancerous changes are identified, and it is highly treatable if cancer is detected early. Regular Pap tests decrease a woman's risk of developing cervical cancer by detecting precancerous cervical lesions, which can be treated effectively.

If screening rates among women at risk increased, deaths from breast and cervical cancers could be avoided. Deaths from these diseases occur disproportionately among women who are uninsured or underinsured. Mammography and Pap tests are underused by women who have no source or no regular source of health care, women without health insurance, and women who immigrated to the United States within the past 10 years.

Accomplishments

Since 1991, NBCCEDP programs have served more than 3.7 million women, and provided more than 9.2 million breast and cervical cancer screening examinations. In program year 2009, the NBCCEDP:

- Screened 324,912 women for breast cancer with mammography and found 4,635 breast cancers.
- Screened 320,627 women for cervical cancer with the Pap test and found 4,694 cervical cancers and high-grade precancerous lesions.

Program Outlook: The Value of Partnerships

Federal funding alone cannot fully sustain NBCCEDP programs. While NBCCEDP programs maximize available funding for their services, the current level of funding only supports screening for 15.9% of eligible women for breast cancer and 8.7% of eligible women for cervical cancer. Partners are needed to provide a range of in-kind and monetary contributions to help programs provide greater access to critically needed breast and cervical cancer-related services.

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