

# NC's Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program Saving Lives

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As October is observed as [Breast Cancer Awareness Month in North Carolina](#), the NC Department of Health and Human Services [Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program](#) (NC BCCCP) announced that it has screened more than 89,000 women from 2013 through 2018.

Operated by the NC Division of Public Health, the NC BCCCP and its clinical partners provide free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screenings and follow-up to eligible women in North Carolina.

In that five-year period, the program has helped to diagnose 1,411 cases of breast cancer and 190 cases of cervical cancer. Women enrolled in the program who are provided with at least one screening and/or diagnostic service prior to diagnosis may be eligible to receive additional services. Many of these women are able to receive lifesaving treatment through the NC Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Medicaid Program.

“This program is a great tool in the fight against cancer, providing lifesaving treatment to women who do not have access to health insurance, but it is not enough,” said DHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen, MD. “There is plenty more work to do and expanding Medicaid could help assure that many more women would have access to important detection and care services.”

On average in North Carolina, the percent of women who are uninsured when diagnosed with breast cancer is 2.6%. However, in six counties – Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Pasquotank and Scotland – more than 5% of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no access to health insurance. Expanding access to health insurance could allow preventive and treatment services to be offered to thousands more women in North Carolina.

Research has shown that Medicaid expansion is associated with earlier cancer diagnosis and improved access to cancer treatment. A 2018 study in Kentucky found that expansion there was associated with earlier diagnosis of breast cancer and signs of improved quality of breast cancer care. North Carolina is among 14 states that have not expanded Medicaid.

It is estimated that more than 9,800 women in North Carolina will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019 and more than 1,450 will die from the disease. One in eight North Carolina women is at risk for developing breast cancer within their lifetime. Breast cancer is the second most common form of cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States.

The work of NC BCCCP is a collaborative effort. Each year the program provides services to more than 12,000 women at local health departments, community health centers, hospitals and

physicians' offices across the state. More than 100 local health agencies work in cooperation with physicians, hospitals and other health care facilities to provide screenings to eligible North Carolina women.

“We are proud to work with numerous clinical partners across North Carolina to offer these breast cancer screenings,” said Mark Benton, DHHS Assistant Secretary for Public Health. “We recommend all women over the age of 45 have conversations with their doctor about breast cancer screenings.”

With routine mammogram screening and follow-up testing, the disease can be detected early and more effectively treated.

“If a woman suspects something is abnormal with her breast and is uninsured, she should seek out a [local NC BCCCP program](#),” said Debi Nelson, who heads the Division of Public Health’s Cancer Prevention and Control Branch. “If diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer in the NC BCCCP, she may be eligible for treatment services.” Nelson also noted that taxpayers have the opportunity when filing state income taxes to contribute to the program.

Being aware of the health information, education, treatment and support available can help individuals receive appropriate care and access resources to improve their quality of life. The state of North Carolina encourages people to recognize that breast cancer is treatable, and that routine screening and early detection can save lives.

For more information about North Carolina’s Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program, go to [bcccp.ncdhhs.gov](http://bcccp.ncdhhs.gov).