

Supporting Women's Health in the Workplace

Helping Women with Breast Cancer Choose Between Surgical Treatment Options

THE CHALLENGE: Patients with early-stage breast cancer can often choose between two treatment options: Mastectomy and breast-conserving surgery. Women of lower socioeconomic status (SES) with early-stage breast cancer are more likely to report lower doctor-patient communication, lower involvement in decision making, and higher decision regret than women of higher SES.

To continue improving health equity, medical care and benefits must ensure access to understandable decision-making supports, particularly when breast cancer is in its earliest, most treatable stages.

The focus of a recent collaboration between the National Alliance and Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI®) is on helping employers support women across socioeconomic levels in making informed early-stage breast cancer choices.

PCORI® Research Study

Helping Women with Breast Cancer Choose Between Surgical Treatment Options

The research team tested two conversation aids used during clinic visits to help patients choose the treatment that works best for them: Picture option (4-page, easy-to-read summary of surgery options with pictures) and option grid (1-page, easy-to-read table of surgery options with answers to common questions).

The Study:

The study included 615 White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and mixed-race women with early-stage breast cancer.

The Results:

Compared with usual care, patients receiving the picture option grid had higher knowledge, felt more involved in the decision process, and had lower decision regret, among other things.

Get the details [here](#).

COSTS



Breast cancer has the highest treatment cost of any cancer, accounting for 14% of costs – \$26.2B for medical services and \$3.5B for prescription drugs.

CONTEXT



Except for some types of skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the US. About 1 in 8 (12%) of these women will develop invasive breast cancer. About 85% of those with breast cancer have no family history of the disease.

CONSEQUENCES



Almost 99% of women diagnosed with breast cancer in the earliest stage live for 5 years or more, compared to about 32% of those diagnosed at the most advanced stage.

“The What Matters Most trial demonstrated that the early-stage breast cancer conversation aids, when used by surgeons after brief training, improved shared decision-making and other patient-reported outcomes.”

—Danielle Schubbe, PhD

Employers can provide simple, frequent employee reminders about the importance of breast cancer awareness, early detection, and treatment

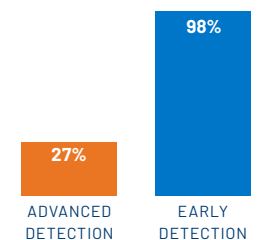
Although the biggest risk factors for breast cancer are being a woman and growing older, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists several lifestyle choices that may help reduce risk, including:

- ▶ Maintaining a healthy weight.
- ▶ Getting regular exercise.
- ▶ Limiting alcohol consumption.
- ▶ Breastfeeding your babies, if possible.
- ▶ Consulting with your doctor about whether oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy is right for you, as both can increase your risk of developing breast cancer



People assigned female at birth and at average risk of breast cancer are advised to begin having annual mammograms at age 40

Survival rate by detection



Early detection leads to higher survival rates

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1

Understand Impact



Understanding how – and how many – employees are affected by breast cancer enables senior leadership and benefits and HR professionals to lead with vision, compassion and responsiveness.

A thorough claims assessment helps uncover the number of employees affected by breast cancer and whether they are getting recommended care.

Women with breast cancer and their loved ones benefit greatly from workplace support. This includes things like ensuring ready access to resources, guidance, and personalized navigation services from health plans and other benefit providers. Quick response plans for supervisors and managers should also be in place to assist the employee and coworkers throughout the cancer journey.

2

Involve Employees



The American Cancer Society estimates there will be over [300,000](#) new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in US women in 2024 alone.

From prevention, to diagnosis, to treatment, to survivorship, easy-to-read, pictorial employee communications and education are vital for all employees.

It's also important to help coworkers understand how to support a colleague with breast cancer. The most important thing is to follow their lead, as outlined in this [Harvard Business Review](#) article. The quick response plan identified in step one supports rapid and thoughtful approaches.

3

Design Benefits with Breast Cancer in Mind



Key things employers/purchasers can consider when designing benefits with breast cancer in mind:

- ▶ Screening coverage for all women (benefit- and non-benefit-eligible).
- ▶ Flexible work arrangements to help employees balance treatment with work duties.
- ▶ Health and wellness programs that address prevention and early detection.
- ▶ Reduced out-of-pocket expenses for follow-up care.
- ▶ Health plan requirement to send mammogram reminders to employees and providers.
- ▶ Care navigators available to guide women on their cancer journey.

4

Consider Cultural Differences



Health-seeking behavior and breast cancer risk varies among racial and ethnic groups, making it important to tailor communications and education to meet unique needs.

[Triple-negative breast cancer](#) accounts for about 10%–15% of all breast cancers. These cancers tend to be more common in women younger than age 40, who are Black, or who have a BRCA1 mutation.

Further, White, Asian, and Pacific Islander women are [more likely to be diagnosed](#) with localized breast cancer than Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaska Native women.

Navigating Breast Cancer Treatment Options Video



The National Alliance created an [educational video](#) about breast cancer, its human and financial impact, and recommendations for supporting employees in the workplace, featuring the evidence-based study and coalition thought leaders.

Danielle Schubbe, PhD

Research Project Manager, The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice



“The picture-enhanced conversation aid was particularly effective with patients who had lower socioeconomic status and lower health literacy.”

Kim Thiboldeaux

CEO, Northeast Business Group on Health (NEBGH)



“During what can be an overwhelming and chaotic time, patients need tools to participate fully in their healthcare.”

Karen van Caulil, PhD

President & CEO, Florida Alliance for Healthcare Value



“Employers should implement shared decision-making principles in designing health benefits and wellness programs to improve the value and impact of healthcare services they and their employees are purchasing.”

RESOURCES

- [Helping Women with Breast Cancer Choose Between Surgical Treatment Options \(Full PCORI study\)](#)
- [Helping Women with Breast Cancer Choose Between Surgical Options \(National Alliance Video\)](#)
- [Cancer in Working Age Adults: Employer Actions \(NEBGH flipbook\)](#)
- [Employer Guide and Insights for Oncology Management \(Florida Alliance for Healthcare Value\)](#)
- [Your Cancer Roadmap: Navigating Life with Resilience \(Book authored by Kim Thiboldeaux\)](#)