

Researchers identify barriers to breast cancer screening in vulnerable populations

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Women of racial and ethnic minorities experience challenges that hinder adherence to regular mammography screenings.

In order to propose public health measures to increase [adherence](#), researchers have identified the barriers that affect adherence to [breast cancer-screening](#) programs in an ethnically diverse group of women. The analysis was published recently in the journal *Cancers*.

Breast cancer remains the leading cause of death among women globally, with 2.2 million cases reported in 2020 alone. Early detection through regular mammography screenings has proven to be effective in reducing mortality rates. As the World Health Organization (WHO) strives to achieve a 2.5% annual reduction in breast cancer deaths and prevent 25% of deaths by 2030, the success of screening programs becomes paramount. Unfortunately, adherence to these programs falls short of expectations within certain population groups, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions.

"Dissemination of breast cancer-screening programs is still lacking in most of the vulnerable populations," says Fátima Morales, Affiliate Assistant Professor at the Sbarro Health Research Organization (SHRO) at Temple University. "But, we observed important favorable changes in those cases in which the population undergoes health education sessions, they are informed about cancer-screening programs, or they seek medical attention."

The research was conducted by Morales in collaboration with co-authors including Dr. Palmira Immordino, Professor at the University of Palermo, Italy; and Dr. Antonio Giordano, Founder and President of SHRO.

"Particularly concerning is the lowest adherence among women who are Black, Asian, Hispanic, and immigrants," Morales says.

Awareness programs aimed at migrant and non-white women—utilizing familiar settings such as schools, media outlets and supermarkets, as well

as education programs—have shown promise in increasing knowledge and participation.

The study recommends the importance of annual health checkups and engaging healthcare professionals in patient enrollment and reminders. By addressing the information gap and mistrust in healthcare systems, doctor-patient relationships can foster trust. Furthermore, enhancing cultural competence among healthcare professionals to better understand the populations they serve can establish meaningful connections and encourage their engagement in screening programs.

"By emphasizing the importance of breast cancer screening and fostering a sense of empowerment," says Giordano, "these campaigns can effectively increase participation rates."

Addressing the identified barriers will not only contribute to reducing breast cancer mortality rates but also ensure equitable access to lifesaving screenings for all women.

More information: Laura Ponce-Chazarri et al, Barriers to Breast Cancer-Screening Adherence in Vulnerable Populations, *Cancers* (2023). DOI: [10.3390/cancers15030604](https://doi.org/10.3390/cancers15030604)

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