

Addressing cancer screening behaviors in the Muslim community in Washington

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A study has revealed insights into the cancer screening behaviors of Muslims in the Washington, D.C., area, highlighting the influence of cultural and religious beliefs on health practices. The study, conducted in

collaboration with key faith leaders from four mosques in the region, underscores the need for culturally and religiously sensitive health initiatives to improve cancer screening rates among Muslims.

The findings were published in the [Journal of Cancer Education](#).

The Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, which includes parts of Virginia and Maryland (DMV), is home to one of the largest and most diverse Muslim communities in the United States. Despite this, cancer screening behaviors within this community remain under-researched. To address this gap, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted with 203 participants recruited through [community outreach](#) and engagement efforts. This collaborative approach ensured that the questions posed were both religiously and culturally sensitive.

Key findings from the study include an overall lower rate of screening among the Muslim population surveyed than in the DMV:

- Colorectal cancer screenings: 35% of both men and women reported receiving a screening for colorectal cancer with colonoscopy, a much lower rate than overall in the DMV area (DC: 82%; Virginia: 67.6%; and Maryland: 72.5%);
- Mammogram Screenings: 56% of women surveyed reported receiving a mammogram screening, a much lower rate than overall in the DMV (D.C.: 80%; Virginia: 76.2%; and Maryland: 81.2%);
- Prostate cancer screenings: 45% of men reported receiving a prostate cancer antigen test (a higher rate than overall in D.C., but lower than in Virginia and Maryland); and
- Cervical cancer screenings: 83% of women reported receiving screening for cervical cancer (comparable to the overall rate in the DMV).

The study also revealed that many participants relied on their faith to guide their cancer screening decisions. Women were more likely than men to rely on their faith when dealing with [health concerns](#).

"Findings from our study highlight that religious and cultural beliefs may play a role in influencing health behaviors; however, to better understand those roles, we need to continue to engage with the Muslim community in the DMV area in order to create an avenue for providing [health education](#) in a religiously and culturally sensitive way," said Aisha Choudhri, MPH, CHES, community health educator at the Ralph Lauren Center for Cancer Prevention at Georgetown University's Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center in Washington.

Participants expressed a strong interest in having health initiatives related to cancer education, screening and survivorship integrated within mosques. This preference suggests that mosques could serve as vital centers for health education and intervention, leveraging the trust and influence of faith leaders to promote better health outcomes.

The study's findings emphasize the need for ongoing engagement with key faith leaders to effectively leverage [religious beliefs](#) in promoting health education and cancer screening. By understanding the spiritual and religious underpinnings that drive or inhibit health-seeking behaviors, [health care providers](#) can tailor their approaches to better meet the needs of the Muslim community.

As the Muslim population in the U.S. is expected to grow significantly in the coming decades, addressing health care disparities and ensuring culturally and religiously sensitive health care services will become increasingly important.

"In working closely with the Muslim community in the DMV area to better understand and address their cancer-related health needs, we hope

these efforts can help inform education and outreach about health, prevention and cancer [screening](#) practices to broader communities throughout the U.S.," Choudhri said.

More information: Aisha Choudhri et al, Cancer-Related Health and Educational Needs and Faith-Based Health Beliefs in an Urban Muslim Population, *Journal of Cancer Education* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s13187-024-02439-4](#)

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