

Summary Report: A Study on the Breast Cancer Information Needs of African American Women Below 45

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You are receiving this report because you took part in a project with our team at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. We interviewed you to understand how to raise awareness about breast cancer for young African American women. We are sharing this report to update you on what we learned from the interviews. The information will help improve the messages young African American women receive about breast cancer.

Why African American women below 45 years?

We focus on African American women below 45 years old because our community partners in Maryland shared that this is an important group of women to reach. African American women diagnosed with breast cancer below 45 years of age are more likely to die from the disease than young women of other races.



If you have feedback on the information presented here or have questions about this project, please feel free to contact Leonore Okwara, Project Manager at (301) 405-7545 or lokwara@umd.edu. Or reach Dr. Cheryl L. Knott by email at cholt14@umd.edu.

With your help, we will improve health in our communities

Here's what we learned

As a young African American woman, you need to know:

#1 - Facts about Breast Cancer



1a. A lump or pain are not the only breast cancer symptoms.

“I’m a big advocate for this when I do speaking engagements – what I really wish I knew – even though my symptom is a lump– is that a lump is not the only symptom. A lot of women, their cancer is missed and late stage diagnosis because they’re looking for a lump.”
– Survivor



1b. Triple negative breast cancer affects young African American women more than women of other races. Also, it is often diagnosed after the cancer has grown. So, young African American women might need to be more alert about checking for breast cancer than young women of other races.



1c. Know fact from fiction.

“There are negative rumors and stereotypes out there I’ll just say the community as a whole latches onto. These are barriers. ‘I heard mammograms cause cancers so I’m not going to get a mammogram’”
– Healthcare provider



1d. African American women with breast cancer under age 45 are more likely to die from breast cancer than young women of other races.



1e. Breast cancer is one of the most treatable cancers. It is not a death sentence.

Here's what we learned (cont'd)

As a young African American woman, you need to know:

#2 - What you can do about breast cancer



2a. Know how to do breast self-exams. Also, think about doing self-exams regularly.

“Really making it a point to do it. Don’t skip a month. A month could make the difference between you catching something early, or whatever it is at a later stage. Really take it serious. Make it #1 on your priority list” – Survivor



2b. Some health habits lower your chance of getting breast cancer. Drinking less alcohol, exercising, and being careful about hormone (for example, estrogen and progesterone) exposure can lower the chance of getting breast cancer.

#3 - You are your best advocate



3a. Your family health history. If a family member has had breast cancer or another cancer, this is something to talk with your doctor about in your appointment.

“I wish I knew about everyone’s history because at the doctor they want to know your family history, but Black people don’t know that” – Survivor



3b. Be comfortable asking the doctor questions. Also ask your doctor if there are resources to help pay for breast cancer testing.

“It can be difficult to make a diagnosis because they are young, they do have more breast density. It does present a challenge. They need to be their own best advocate... Keep knocking on doors until somebody takes them seriously and moves them forward.” – Healthcare Provider

3c. Go to the doctor regularly, and bring someone with you for important appointments.

Here's what we learned (cont'd)

#4 - How to reach young African American women with breast cancer information



4a. Breast cancer education presenter: The person who presents information on breast cancer should be young, African American, a survivor of breast cancer, and relatable.

It could also help if a celebrity or another influential person presents the information.

"Representation matters, so having people that look like us, I'm attracted to that. Education can come from healthcare websites, from a white person, or women of color who is older. So having my generation heading it... I would be more drawn to that."

- Family member of a young African American survivor of breast cancer



4b. Use social media and videos. Raise awareness by going to the places where young African American women already are.

These places could be social media, schools, colleges, churches, and events including online events.



4c. Combine facts with a fun, warm, and hopeful tone.

"I think the tone needs to be friendly, and nurturing. It needs to be like your grandma talking to you. It needs to be familial. It needs to be not threatening even though the data is devastating. It needs to be a happy place. It needs to be like when you leave for your college, and what does your grandmother say to you?...Make it maternal, and sisterly...It can't be the wait until marriage to have sex conversation because it needs to be realistic and important"

- Leader of community organization focused on breast cancer among African American Women

Breast Cancer Resources for Young Women

Maryland Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (BCCP)

Link: <https://bit.ly/bccpmd0>

1-800-477-9974

Provides assistance to Maryland residents who are 40 and older (please call for more information); who have a household income at or below 250% of federal poverty guidelines; who do not have health insurance or have health insurance but have not been able to pay for testing.

Baltimore City Cancer Program

Link: <https://www.umms.org/umgcc/cancer-services/cancer-care/baltimore-city-cancer-program>

410-328-HOPE

Provides free breast and cervical cancer screenings for Baltimore residents (based on eligibility) Monday through Friday from 8:30 am - 4 pm.

American Breast Cancer Foundation (ABCF) - Columbia, Maryland

Link: <http://www.abcf.org>

410-730-5105

ABCF is a national nonprofit that assists individuals of all ages for breast cancer screening and diagnostic testing costs. Individuals can be with and without insurance qualify.



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