About California Black Women’s Health Project (CABWHP)
The California Black Women’s Health Project is the only statewide, non-profit organization that is solely committed to improving the health of California’s 1.2 million Black women and girls through advocacy, education, outreach and policy. We seek to empower women to become active participants in improving their health status.

About Close to Your Heart Community. Empowerment. Grace.

Breast Cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for Black women in the United States. Black women are a diverse group encompassing an array of socioeconomic strata, cultural beliefs, and behaviors. Despite Black women’s rich diversity, scientific research and communication often overlook the broader social context that contributes to breast cancer mortality rates.

CABWHP’s Close to Your Heart adopts an intersectional approach and seeks to foster awareness that can lead to early detection and more efficient medical treatment for Black women. We strive to promote a safe space that prioritizes the mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of breast cancer patients and survivors.
What is breast cancer?

Chemo, surgery, and pink ribbons may be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of breast cancer, but it is so much more than that. Breast cancer impacts the hearts, minds, and souls of all the individuals and communities touched by the disease. Let’s discover a bit more about what is close to the heart of our community.

Breast cancer is a result of normal breast cells growing and reproducing out of control. The type of cancer is dependent upon which breast cells become cancerous.

THE FACTS

- Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for Black women.⁶
- Black women have a higher incidence of breast cancer before the age of 40 and are more likely to be diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer (an aggressive form of breast cancer that tends to grow and spread faster than other types of breast cancer).¹³
  - Triple-negative breast cancer is less likely to be found early.¹⁰
- Over 250,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer yearly in the United States.¹¹
- There are over 3.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.⁸
Why is breast cancer the leading cause of cancer death for Black women?

• Mammography screening is a highly effective method for diagnosing and treating breast cancer. It is the most efficient when conducted in early stages. **Black women face environmental and social challenges, such as structural racism in educational and health care settings, that prevent them from obtaining mammograms.**

• Barriers such as lack of health insurance, access to a primary care provider, child-care support, and transportation limit Black women’s ability to receive a mammogram screening.

• Due to these factors, Black women are
  • more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage
  • less likely to receive stage-appropriate treatment
  • more likely to have lower stage-for-stage survival rates

What can I do?

• Be relentless in advocating for your health. Your story matters. Your health matters. **In this community, you are not alone.**

Keep reading to learn more about how you can take control of your health and well-being.
A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms are the best way to detect breast cancer early. Regular mammography screening can lower your risk of dying from breast cancer.4

**When should I start getting mammograms? How often?**

- According to the American Cancer Society, women ages **40 to 44** should have the **choice to start annual mammography screenings**, if they wish to do so.

- Women ages **45 to 54** should get mammograms **every year**.

- Women **55 and older** can switch to mammograms **every 2 years**, or can continue yearly screening.2

- All women, of any age, should become familiar with the benefits and limitations linked to mammography screening.

- **You are never too young to start caring about your breast health.**
Are there other types of detection methods?

- **Clinical breast exam**
  - A doctor or nurse will examine the breasts and underarm areas for any lumps or changes. It is usually done during your regular check-up.\(^5\)

- **Breast MRI**
  - This screening is conducted for women at higher risk. You may be considered high risk if you have a *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* inherited gene mutation or have a first degree relative (mother, sister, daughter) with a *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* inherited gene mutation.\(^3\)
  - You should talk with your health care provider to determine if you are at high risk and need a breast MRI.

Self-awareness is key. Becoming familiar with the look and feel of your breasts can help you notice symptoms such as lumps, pain, or changes in size that may be of concern. You should report any changes that you notice to your doctor or health care provider.

**Know Your Lemons**

Self-exam and early detection techniques can help support better breast health. Find more tips at [https://knowyourlemons.org/](https://knowyourlemons.org/)
Access to Care

Covered California
Covered California is a free service that connects Californians with brand-name health insurance under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. It’s the only place where you can get financial help when you buy health insurance from well-known companies.

https://www.coveredca.com/

Health in Her HUE
Health In Her HUE is a digital platform that connects Black women and women of color to culturally competent and sensitive health care providers, and offers health information and content that centers their lived experiences.

https://healthinherhue.com/

Where can I go to get screened?
Use this FDA site to search for a facility near you:

https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfMQSA/mqsa.cfm

CDC’s National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP)
NBCCEDP helps low income individuals who do not have adequate insurance to gain access to timely breast and cervical cancer screening, diagnostic, and treatment services. They also provide patient navigation services to help patients overcome barriers and get timely access to quality care.

https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/

Every Woman Counts (EWC)
EWC provides free breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services to California’s underserved populations. The mission of the Every Woman Counts Program is to mitigate the devastating medical, emotional and financial effects of breast and cervical cancer and eliminate health disparities for medically underserved, low-income individuals.

https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/Cancer/ewc/Pages/default.aspx
Need a ride?

**Brem Foundation’s Wheels for Women**

Wheels for Women offers free transportation to and from breast health appointments, ensuring that women have access to breast screenings. The B-Fund is distributed solely through a formal grant process with medical center partners.

https://www.bremfoundation.org/accessforwomeninneed

**American Cancer Society Road To Recovery**

The American Cancer Society Road To Recovery program provides transportation to and from treatment for people with cancer who do not have a ride or are unable to drive themselves.

“Breathe, darling. This is just a chapter, not your whole story.”

- S.C. Lourie
Healing of the mind, body, and soul starts with support.

**After Breast Cancer Diagnosis (ABCD)**

This online service can match you with a professionally-trained mentor/breast cancer survivor who not only shares a similar diagnosis and treatment but whose age, life stage, and interests closely align with yours. All ABCD Services are free, confidential, and available at any point during your breast cancer journey.

https://abcdbreastcancersupport.org/

**Living Beyond Breast Cancer**

Living Beyond Breast Cancer is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to create a world that understands there is more than one way to have breast cancer. This site offers a multitude of resources and blogs that are tailored to your experience (recently diagnosed, in treatment, young women, etc.). Follow this link to gain more information to support your emotional and practical needs.

https://www.lbbc.org/

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**Supporting someone you know with breast cancer:**

Offering a breast cancer patient with emotional support during their journey can be very powerful and impactful. Here are a few tips to get started:

- **Be yourself.** It’s okay if you are not sure what to say. Let them know you care.
- **Take time to check in with them.** Be available to listen. Talking can be tiring at times, so sometimes there is no need for words.
- **It may be challenging for them to ask for help.** Offer support with daily tasks, like meals, grocery shopping, housework, etc..
- **Offer to drive them to appointments or medical treatments.**
- **Be respectful of their needs.**
Self-care

How to feel better during breast cancer treatment:

- Feeling nauseous? Incorporating more natural ginger in your diet (like in sodas, teas, and candies) may help ease nausea side effects.
- Regular exercise can help to give you more energy. Try yoga, walking, or other moderate activities to help combat fatigue.
- Experiencing other side effects from chemo? Follow this link to learn more self-care tips.

https://www.webmd.com/breast-cancer/treatment-feel-better

Did you know?

Essential oils can help relieve certain side effects from chemotherapy (like stress, anxiety, and difficulty sleeping). Try filling your room with the scent of a calming essential oil, like lavender, before bed!

Not sure what to bring with you during chemotherapy treatments? Here are a few items you may want to pack in your wellness go-bag:

- **Comfortable clothes.** For comfort and ease.
- **Socks and a blanket.** Hospitals can be chilly. Who doesn’t love to cozy up in a warm blanket and fuzzy socks?
- **Water.** Fight off dehydration and headaches by drinking plenty of water.
- **Snacks.** Just in case you get a little hungry.
- **Entertainment** (laptop, tablet, books, music, journal). Pass the time by diving into a new story or doodling to your heart’s content.
- **Throat lozenges or hard candy.** Find some relief from dry mouth and nausea side effects.
- **Lip balm.** Soothe chapped lips and smile brighter.

Most importantly, **bring support.** Bring a friend, a loved one, someone close to your heart.
Mental Health

If it ever feels like you can’t make it through, there are resources to help you. Your mental health is just as important as your breast health.

Blue Note Therapeutics

Blue Note Therapeutics is a prescription digital therapeutics company dedicated to making mental healthcare services available to any cancer patient at any time.

https://bluenotetherapeutics.com/

The Shine

The Shine is an app that offers various videos, podcasts, and articles for guided meditation and intentionality to improve mental wellness. It is curated by women of color and is specifically geared towards organizing a system that is more inclusive and representative for people of color to focus on their mental and emotional health.

https://www.theshineapp.com/

Sisters Mentally Mobilized (SMM)

A project of California Black Women’s Health Project designed to prevent and decrease mental health stigma, anxiety, and isolation in Black women. SMM offers advocacy training and social support networks.

https://www.cabwhp.org/sisters-mentally-mobilized.html
References


