

Mammograms: Are We Asking the Wrong Question?

Statement from Breast Cancer Fund

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Final recommendations released today by the [U.S. Preventive Services Task Force](#) echo those in 2009 that moved the beginning age for annual mammograms from 40 to 50 and started a national conversation that ignited fear and confusion in women across the country.

The mission of the Breast Cancer Fund is to prevent breast cancer by eliminating our exposure to toxic chemicals and radiation linked to the disease. As such, we have long held concerns about the risk of exposing women's breasts repeatedly to small amounts of ionizing radiation and the adoption of uniform recommendations about its use whether lowering the age to 40, changing the screening intervals or reinstating the recommendation for age 50.

A blanket guideline for mammography is the antithesis of personalized medicine and belies the complexity of breast cancer. The reliance on mammography as a tool for detection also undermines the need for directing our national health resources toward the development of screening methods that do not rely on a carcinogen linked to breast cancer (ionizing radiation). The reliance on mammography also undermines efforts to address primary prevention of the disease in the first place.

Breast cancer is a devastating disease. Women (and men) who are diagnosed with the disease are not mere statistics; each woman has her own story, and we hear daily about women who have found their tumor through mammography or self-discovery.

Every woman lives with the knowledge and fear that she may someday be diagnosed regardless of her family, reproductive and lifestyle histories. For those who do receive a diagnosis, there are often years sometimes decades of pain, anxiety and worry about the possibility of a recurrence.

As we did in 2009, we ask the question: Why can't we safely and effectively screen for breast cancer? With the passage of time, the opportunity is delayed to recognize the weaknesses of our current tools for detecting and predicting the progression of existing breast cancers. And more importantly, it is time to truly turn the conversation from the need for finding cancers that may or may not warrant treatment to better understanding the causes of the disease and engaging in our collective efforts to minimize those risks that are controllable. Two years ago a report written by a federal advisory committee of leading breast cancer experts found that identifying and eliminating the environmental causes of breast cancer presents the greatest opportunity to prevent the disease. It is time to fully invest in the primary prevention of breast cancer.

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*The Breast Cancer Fund is the leading national organization working to prevent breast cancer by eliminating our exposure to toxic chemicals linked to the disease.
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