

# State DOH launches cervical and breast cancer screening program

The state Department of Health has launched a program that will provide free breast and cervical cancer screening for medically under-served women throughout the state. The program, "Malama I Ke Ola o Na Wahine," is Hawai'i's version of the national Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. It is funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The goal of the Early Detection Program is to reduce the disproportionately high breast and cervical cancer mortality rates, particularly among elderly, poor and minority women. The program is being administered by the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP), a section within DOH's Community Health Nursing Division.

Dr. Ron Metler, Kaua'i District Health Officer, noted that Kaua'i was very successful as one of only three Pilot Projects in the state. "We were able to provide free breast and cervical cancer screenings to over 130 un-insured and under-insured women on Kaua'i last fall. With the help of the two local mammography facilities (Kaua'i Veteran's Memorial Hospital and Wilcox Hospital) we carefully addressed the things women identified in our local focus groups as "barriers" which have kept them from receiving these services. For example, through our program, many women are now able to make one appointment and see a doctor, have a pap smear and a mammogram in just two hours."

Rebecca Sagum, Executive Director of Ho'ola Lahui Hawai'i, which will provide oversight to the project noted that Kaua'i has just been notified we will receive four more years of funding to extend this service to more Kaua'i women. "Women care for our families, and they want us to stay healthy for them. This means taking care of yourself now, so you are there for them later. Having these tests can save your life."

A woman's risk for developing breast and cervical cancer increases with age. Kaua'i project nurse, Lissa

Lang, said, "Every woman over 50 should have an annual mammogram, and every woman over 18 should have an annual pap test."

Unfortunately, many women don't go for these tests once they finish child-bearing. Our services can help you feel more comfortable about having the tests, and can pay or help to pay for those who are un-insured, or who are insured but can't afford their co-pay or deductible."

Here are the facts:

- Those at highest risk of dying of breast or cervical cancer in Hawai'i are Native Hawaiians, Filipinas, and women over age 50.

- While 2/3 of cervical cancer cases in Hawai'i occur in women under age 40, 41% of deaths from cervical cancer were women aged 65 +.

- Mammograms can dramatically reduce breast cancer deaths among women over 50, and the pap test has reduced cervical cancer deaths by 75%.

- The National Cancer Institute recommends that all women over age 18 should have a pap test every year. Every woman over age 40 should have a mammogram every 1 or 2 years, and women over 50 should have a mammogram every year.

If you are between the ages of 50 and 64, and need help paying for these services, if you know someone in this situation, or if you just have questions about the tests or the program, please call the Kaua'i Breast and Cervical Cancer Project at 245-7767.

There is also new information about these services for women on Medicare. If you have Medicare Parts A & B, your coverage has changed 1998, so that you can receive a mammogram every year without a co-pay or deductible, and a pap test every 3 years, or more often if their physician recommends it. Women who have Medicare Part A and are eligible for Part B, but don't have it because of cost, can also get free services, and should call the Kaua'i project at 245-7767.