

# Plan to Increase Cancer Screening among Employees





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This document outlines a plan to increase the use of recommended cancer screening tests within your organization.

### The Importance of Cancer Screening

Regular cancer screening is an important activity for many reasons:

- Screening can help to detect cancer in people before they have symptoms. Screening can help detect cancer early when it might be easier to treat. In some cases, certain cancers can be prevented with regular screening.<sup>1</sup> See also the American Cancer Society recommendations for the early detection of cancer.
- Business leaders support the health and productivity of their employees by promoting cancer screening.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Better health may equate to lower health insurance costs, less absenteeism, less presenteeism, and higher productivity.<sup>3</sup>

### Steps for Increasing Cancer Screening

**1. Set an organizational screening goal. It is important to know the number of employees who are up to date with screening and the number who are not.**

- Ask your insurance providers to help you determine your organizational cancer screening numbers. The following examples are based on the American Cancer Society screening guidelines for patients at average risk and include important data that can be requested and tracked.
  - For colorectal cancer screening, consider determining the total number of people ages 45 and older who are up to date with screening recommendations versus those who are not.
  - For breast cancer screening, consider determining the total number of women ages 45 and older who are up to date with screening recommendations versus those who are not. (Keep in mind the American Cancer Society recommends women can begin screening with mammograms at age 40 if they wish to do so.)
  - For cervical cancer screening, consider determining the total number of people who have a cervix and are ages 25 and older who are up to date with screening recommendations versus those who are not.
- You can also consider using a health risk assessment to survey employees about their use of recommended cancer screening tests.
- Once you have determined your current organizational screening numbers, set a 12-month target goal. Then follow steps 2-5 below to increase awareness and reduce barriers to screening.
- Every year, reassess your organizational screening numbers and determine additional steps to increase screening. .



## INCREASE AWARENESS ABOUT CANCER SCREENING OPTIONS AND THEIR BENEFITS.

### 2. You can promote screening through email, newsletters, flyers, and social media.

If you have employees whose primary language is not English, make sure materials are available in their preferred languages, too. Educate employees about the fact that regular cancer screening can often help prevent certain cancers or may help find cancer early when it might be easier to treat.

#### **Colorectal cancer:**

- Colorectal cancer might have no symptoms in the early stages.
- In some cases, regular screening can help prevent colorectal cancer by finding and removing polyps before they have a chance to turn into cancer.
- For men and women at average risk, screening for colorectal cancer should start at age 45. Those at increased risk may need to start screening sooner.
- Several types of tests can be used to screen for colorectal cancer including stool tests and colonoscopies.
- The most important thing is to get screened, no matter which tests a person chooses.

#### **Breast cancer:**

- Getting a regular screening mammogram is the best method for early detection of breast cancer.
- Women at average risk who are ages 45 and older should talk to a health care provider about the breast cancer screening schedule that's best for them.
- Some women at increased risk for breast cancer should start screening earlier and may need to have additional imaging tests.

#### **Cervical cancer:**

- Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) infections.
- While most HPV infections go away on their own, some can lead to cancer.
- HPV infections and cervical precancers usually have no symptoms.
- Regular screening starting at age 25 is recommended to help find potential and actual cervical cancers early when they are more likely to be successfully treated.
- Employee screening options vary based on age and risk and include regular testing for HPV infection or to look for changes in the cervix that may lead to cancer.

#### **Lung cancer:**

- Most lung cancers have already spread and are at an advanced stage when they are first found, making them difficult to treat.
- For certain people at higher risk for lung cancer, annual screening with a low-dose computerized tomography (LDCT) scan may be beneficial in finding some lung cancers early.
- Current or former smokers ages 50 to 80 who are in fairly good health should talk to their doctors about their risk for lung cancer and about the benefits, limitations, and harms of screening to determine if it is a good option for them.



## **Prostate cancer:**

- Prostate cancer can often be found before symptoms start through screening. While screening can help detect prostate cancer early when they might be easier to treat, there is uncertainty about the risks versus the benefits of screening in many men.
- Starting at age 50, men at average risk should talk to a health care provider about the pros and cons of prostate cancer screening so they can decide if testing is the right choice for them. Men who are at increased risk due to race (African American men and Caribbean men of African ancestry) or family history should talk with a health care provider starting at age 45.
- If the decision is made to be tested, a blood test is used to detect the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels. A digital rectal exam may also be done as a screening method.

## **3. Create a company culture that supports regular cancer screening.**

Take action to remove barriers, and make it easier for employees to get screened.

- Reduce barriers by providing employees with time off to get recommended cancer screening that is not deducted from sick leave or other types of paid leave.
- Create an organization-wide cancer screening leave policy. For a colonoscopy, employees will need a full day off from work. For a mammogram or PAP test, two to three hours of leave time may be enough depending on travel and wait times. No time off is needed for a take-home stool-based test.
- Also, consider offering time off for employees to drive a spouse, domestic partner, parent, grandparent, or parent-in-law to and from getting a cancer screening.
- Work with your insurance providers to increase cancer screening rates. Insurers can positively impact screening rates by using a variety of best practices, such as offering no out-of-pocket costs for screening and sending reminders to employees when they are due for screening.
- Work with your insurance providers to offer breast, colorectal, and cervical cancer screening with no out-of-pocket costs. For more information, visit <https://ncrt.org>.
- Work with insurance providers to encourage providers to use reminders that employees are due for cancer screening and direct reminders to employees about screening tests.

## **4. Be a champion!**

Business leaders can take steps to promote the importance of cancer screening in their organization and with other industry leaders.

- Leaders can demonstrate their support for cancer screening by writing a personal message to encourage employees and their loved ones to be screened regularly for cancer.
- Leaders should get screened regularly, and share their own screening story.
- Leaders can adopt supportive policies to create a company culture that promotes regular cancer screening.
- Leaders can talk to other industry leaders about the importance of cancer screening.
- Leaders can join with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network<sup>SM</sup>, the American Cancer Society's nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate, to influence policy change at the local, state, and federal levels to increase access to affordable and quality health care, including potentially lifesaving cancer screening tests for everyone.



## References

1. Smith RA, Andrews KS, Brooks D, et al. Cancer screening in the United States, 2019: A review of current American Cancer Society guidelines and current issues in cancer screening. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 2019;69(3):184-210. doi:10.3322/caac.21557
2. American Cancer Society. *Cancer Prevention & Early Detection Facts & Figures, 2021-2022.* Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2021.
3. The Community Guide. What Works: Cancer Screening: Evidence-Based Interventions for Your Community. thecommunityguide.org. October 2021. Accessed from <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/sites/default/files/assets/What-Works-Factsheet-CancerScreening.pdf> on March 7, 2022.