BREAST CANCER IN THE AMERICAS

KEY STATISTICS

- In the Americas, more than 320,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer and 82,500 women died from this disease, in 2008.
- By 2030, the number of women newly diagnosed with breast cancer is projected to increase 60% in the Americas, if current trends continue.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, breast cancer ranks as the first cancer type both in terms of new cases and deaths.
- Several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean exhibit some of the highest rates for risk of dying from breast cancer, highlighting the inequities in health in the Region.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, a greater proportion of breast cancer deaths occur in women under 65 years of age (58%) as compared to North America (42%).
- Earlier diagnosis coupled with advances in treatment has led to better outcomes and longer survival for women with breast cancer. Yet, many Latin American and Caribbean countries continue to have limited access to these life saving interventions.

KEY MESSAGES

1 BREAST CANCER IS THE MOST COMMON CANCER AND THE LEADING CAUSE OF CANCER DEATHS AMONG WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS.

- Each year over 82,500 women die from this disease in the Americas, despite the improvements in breast cancer care made in the past 20 years with early diagnosis and treatment.
- Almost half of all breast cancer deaths in the Americas (46%) occur in women in Latin America and the Caribbean, although it is often perceived to be a disease affecting women from the North.
- The mortality rates from breast cancer are highest in Northern America and the Caribbean and 1.5 times lower in Central America. Nonetheless, Central America has the lowest breast cancer survival in the region.
- If current trends continue, breast cancer cases are projected to increase to over 507,000 and breast cancer deaths to over 137,000 by 2030 in the Americas, due to demographic changes.

2 COMPREHENSIVE BREAST CANCER PREVENTION AND CONTROL PROGRAMS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REDUCE THE BURDEN OF DISEASE.

THIS INCLUDES EDUCATION, SCREENING AND EARLY DETECTION, DIAGNOSIS, TREATMENT AND PALLIATIVE CARE, WITHIN AN ORGANIZED PROGRAM WITH CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT METHODS.

- Health promotion and health education efforts should aim to improve awareness and understanding among women about the importance of screening and early detection for breast cancer, and not to postpone seeking care in the presence of signs or symptoms.
- While the causes of breast cancer remain largely unknown, risk factors such as family history of breast cancer, early age at menarche and late age at first childbirth, hormone use, obesity, and alcohol have been identified as factors which can increase breast cancer risk.
- Early detection, accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment are the currently available methods to prevent breast cancer deaths.

References: GLOBOCAN 2008. Available from: http://globocan.iarc.fr.

Pan American Health Organization
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3 BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES ARE ATTAINED WITH EARLIER DIAGNOSIS

- Mammography screening has led to earlier diagnosis and thus reductions in breast cancer mortality. It is still inconclusive whether population based programs using breast self exam and clinical breast exam can reduce mortality rates.
- Regardless of the screening test used, the aim is early diagnosis and timely access to appropriate treatment (surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation), which has proven to have a positive impact on survival.

4 PALLIATIVE CARE CAN REDUCE PAIN AND SUFFERING FOR WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER

- Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families, and may also positively influence the course of illness.
- It can meet the needs of women requiring relief from the symptoms of breast cancer, as well as their needs for psychosocial, spiritual and supportive care.
- Palliative care can also offer a support system to help families cope.

KEY ACTIONS BY PAHO

PAHO is working with its Member States to mount and sustain comprehensive cancer control programs which include breast cancer prevention and control. This includes:

- Advocacy and communication to raise the priority of breast cancer on the public health agenda, as well as to improve awareness and understanding of the burden of this disease among women, their families and communities throughout the Americas.
- Promotion of evidence based guidelines, stratified according to available resources, for screening, diagnosis, and treatment.
- Integrating breast health awareness in chronic illness care interventions within primary care services.
- Technical assistance to improve the quality and access to mammography services, and re-training of mammography personnel.
- Improving quality and access to radiotherapy services and strengthening capacity for cancer treatment in the region.

PAHO works closely with partner organizations to coordinate efforts in the Americas, including with the Breast Health Global Initiative, American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen for the Cure among others.

To find out more about cervical cancer in the Americas and PAHO's work, visit:

www.paho.org/cancer http://twitter.com/ncds_paho http://www.facebook.com/PAHONCDs