



In Iowa's Interest:

New Resources for Combating Breast Cancer

by Senator Tom Harkin

Breast cancer is a far-reaching disease that affects hundreds of thousands of women each year and impacts the lives of the millions who love them. It is the most common type of cancer among women in the United States (other than skin cancer) and the National Cancer Institute estimates that this year 207,090 women will develop breast cancer and 39,840 will die from it. I know firsthand just how much this disease can impact a family - my two sisters both had breast cancer, and both died from the disease.

Every October, organizations, governments and individuals come together during Breast Cancer Awareness Month to focus on the importance of early detection, finding a cure and remembering those we have lost. From participating in a marathon to wearing pink in solidarity and remembrance, people honor this month in a variety of ways.

This month also serves as a reminder of the importance of early detection and regular screenings. Both of my sisters developed breast cancer at a time when regular mammograms and improved treatment methods were not widely available and I am convinced to this day that had they gotten regular screenings, they would have lived longer lives.

It is recommended that women perform monthly home breast exams and that women 40 and older have mammograms once every year. Women who are younger than 40 and have risk factors for breast cancer should ask their doctor whether to have mammograms and how often to have them. Survival rates greatly increase when breast cancer is detected early.

Those whose lives have been touched by breast cancer should know that they have a friend in Washington. Last year, the Appropriations subcommittee I chair was able to devote \$215 million to provide breast and cervical cancer screening to low-income women. But perhaps the greatest legislative victory in the fight against breast cancer came with the signing of the historic health care bill, The Affordable Care Act. As part of the new law, recommended preventive health services – such as mammograms – must be provided without co-pays or deductibles. This will eliminate a significant barrier to obtaining this most important screening.

And for those already diagnosed with breast cancer, the new bill lowers out-of-pocket costs for care, prohibits pre-existing condition exclusions for breast cancer survivors and prohibits insurers from charging more based on health status such as a breast cancer diagnosis.

These are truly great strides but there is so much more that we must do. For example, no medical test is always 100 percent accurate, and mammography is no exception. We must research ways to improve the technology to improve accuracy. And ultimately we must find a cure. For these reasons, the National Institutes of Health estimates that \$788 million in federal funding will be used for breast cancer research. With these resources, along with private research, it is my hope that we will soon find a cure so that not another person will have to die from breast cancer and no one else will lose a loved one to this tragic illness.

For more information on cancer research, ways to detect cancer or National Cancer Awareness Month, please visit the National Cancer Institute at <http://www.cancer.gov/>. For more information on the new health reform bill, please visit www.healthcare.gov or call my office at 515-284-4574.