



Pennsylvania
Department of Health



Pennsylvania
Insurance Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, October 28, 2025

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Shapiro Administration Touts New Technology Designed to Identify High-Risk Cancer Patients in Pennsylvania, Encourages Early Screenings



WILKES-BARRE, PA – Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Dr. Debra Bogen and Pennsylvania Insurance Department Policy Director Caroline Beohm visited Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center this week to promote new breast cancer screening advancements in Pennsylvania that use artificial intelligence (AI) to identify high-risk patients and encourage women to schedule their annual mammogram.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, with more than 13,000 women diagnosed in the Commonwealth last year. Preventive screenings are lifesaving for Pennsylvanians, who have a higher rate of breast cancer diagnosis than the national average.

To ensure Pennsylvania women get the care they need, **Governor Josh Shapiro signed into law Act 1 of 2023**, a first-of-its-kind law in the country that requires insurers to cover preventive breast and ovarian cancer screenings at no cost for high-risk women under state-regulated insurance. Act 1 covers supplemental screening MRIs, ultrasounds, and breast cancer-related genetic testing and counseling. These services are at no cost to women at high risk of breast cancer who have individual, small group, and large group insurance plans.

“Early identification of breast cancer is the key to long-term survival,” said **Dr. Bogen**. “I encourage people to get their screening mammogram to ensure they have the best chance at being diagnosed at an early stage. Innovative technologies, like the one being used at Geisinger, will continue to transform and improve medical care, including increasing screening rates for those at the highest risk.”

Emerging technologies in health care continue to enhance the way invasive illnesses are detected. Advancements in preventive services, such as Geisinger’s new pilot

program, advance breast cancer care by using AI to identify patients at highest risk and help them schedule an annual mammogram.

"AI enabled screening tools are a critical step towards improving early detection and saving the lives of our patients. AI can augment the clinician's experience and helps us better understand our patients' risk, helping better manage their health and wellness," said **Ahmad Hanif, MD, Division Chief of Hematology and Oncology at Geisinger's Northeast Region.**

Each month, the AI model evaluates all female patients with a Geisinger primary care provider who are overdue for a mammogram. The model is HIPPA-compliant, ensuring patients' health information remains protected and only accessible by health care providers. The top 50 patients most at risk for breast cancer are flagged based on electronic health record details, such as family history or additional conditions elevating risk. Geisinger's Care Gaps team then follows up with patients by contacting them to discuss concerns and help schedule a mammogram.

Geisinger's pilot program will conclude in December 2025, when insights will be shared to inform early detection services further and improve breast cancer outcomes.

Health care providers, local advocates, and community members are promoting early screening, as part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. Nearly 66% of cases in the United States are diagnosed before cancer has spread outside of the breast. If found early, it can significantly increase the chance of successful treatment, reduce the need for therapies like chemotherapy and surgery, and lower the risk of dying from the disease.

Programs like the [Department of Health's Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program \(PA-BCCEDP\)](#) provide low-income, uninsured, and underinsured women with access to free breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services, including mammograms, Pap and HPV tests, and follow-up diagnostic tests for abnormal screening results. More than 29,000 Pennsylvanian women have been served since 2015, and over 900 breast and cervical cancers have been detected by this program.

Approximately 44% of uninsured women nationwide delayed or went without care due to cost, indicating insurance coverage is a significant factor in breast cancer diagnoses and outcomes.

"During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we want to ensure women know that they have access to these life-saving preventive services at no cost under their health insurance plan," said **Caroline Beohm, PID's Policy Director.** "No woman should have to consider forgoing critical preventive health services over cost, and in Pennsylvania, women with elevated breast cancer risk don't have to."

Additional ways to lower the risk of breast cancer include maintaining a healthy diet and weight, reducing your alcohol consumption, and breastfeeding your baby, when possible.

For more information on breast cancer or free breast and cervical early detection services you may qualify for, visit the [Department of Health's website.](#)

If you are at an increased risk for breast cancer and your state-regulated insurance plan is not covering any services under Act 1 of 2023, please contact the [Pennsylvania Insurance Department](#).

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Editor's Note: Video downloads and photos from the news conference at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center are available on [PAcast](#).