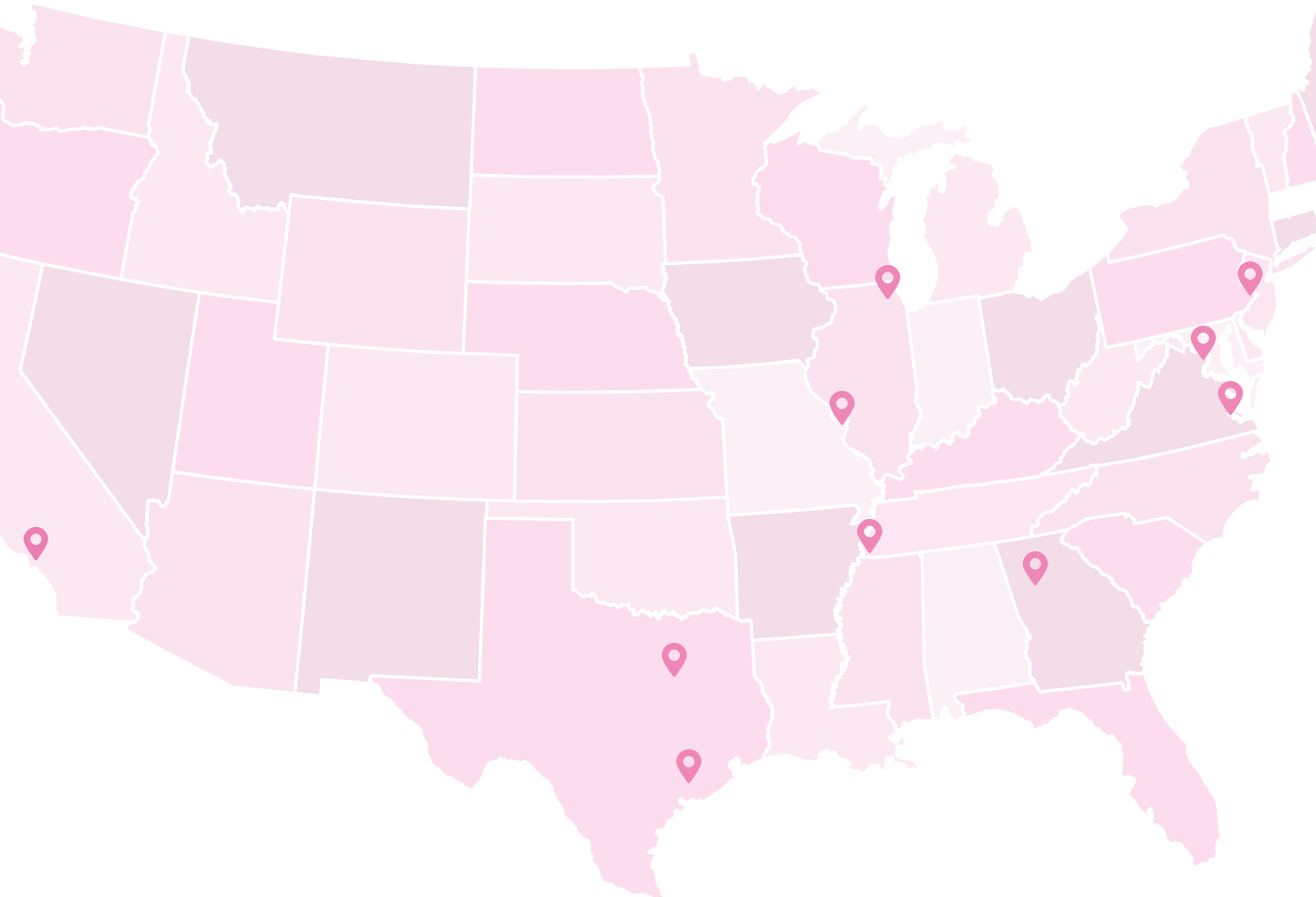


Closing the Breast Cancer Gap:  
A Roadmap to Save the Lives  
of Black Women in America

2021

SUMMARY



# Closing the Breast Cancer Gap: A Roadmap to Save the Lives of Black Women in America

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## SUMMARY

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## ATLANTA, GA

### BREAST CANCER'S DEADLY DIVIDE

#### Racial Disparity in Mortality Rate Pervasive in Atlanta

According to a new in-depth report from Susan G. Komen, the breast cancer mortality rate for Black Women is higher than that of white women in nearly every county in the Atlanta metro area. While Black women are more likely to get screened, they're also more likely to die due to such barriers as economic insecurity, lack of adequate insurance and poor access to high-quality care.

Focus group participants stated they experienced delays in both screening and diagnoses that were likely responsible for the area's high late-stage diagnosis rates—from hours-long wait times to physically evident tumors that went undiagnosed after multiple attempts. Black women described the financial strains of treatment and a severe lack of compassion at the hands of their health care providers.

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“You should not have to wait four and five hours to be screened.  
But because I get Medicaid and go to a free clinic, they take their time.”  
- Undiagnosed

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### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The legacy of segregation continues to drive disparities in breast cancer care and outcomes.
- Transportation to high-quality care is a significant barrier.
- Counties and neighborhoods of Black communities are more likely to be low income, uninsured and face food insecurity.
- Black women are screened more than white women, but still die more often due to barriers to high-quality care.
- Participants felt the screening process could be done with more care and compassion.
- Community members emphasized the importance of having access to financial and caretaking assistance.

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## CHICAGO, IL

### HIGHER MORTALITY RATES FOR BLACK WOMEN

#### In Chicago, Breast Cancer Kills Along Racial Lines

Although investments in high-quality screening have reduced racial disparities in breast cancer in Chicago, there's still more work to do. Black women continue to experience higher mortality rates than white women in each of the metro area's nine counties, with the greatest disparity in Cook County, where 56 percent of the population resides.

In a new in-depth report from Susan G. Komen, Black women relay experiences of racism in their treatment and implicit bias based on the insurance they have. Transportation presents a significant barrier. And Black neighborhoods are often served by clinics with older, less accurate screening equipment and staffed by technicians not adequately trained or experienced, which likely results in later-stage diagnoses.

“In places like Chicago, transportation is so important to your ability to access care in a timely manner. You need to be able to get to the treating facility without having to take 10 buses and a train...it is a huge problem.”

- Provider

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Chicago counties with large Black populations face more poverty, poorer health care quality and higher breast cancer deaths than other counties.
- Many area hospitals have invested in improvements but turn away patients due to the type of insurance they have, such as Medicaid, that often reimburses the provider at lower rates than other insurance.
- Some areas within the Chicago Metropolitan Area have experienced an influx of new immigrants from Muslim African nations who do not speak English, do not have a familiarity with U.S. health care system and have different religious/cultural norms. The barriers they face as Black women are therefore compounded, and the faith and community-based organizations they rely upon are likely to differ from those of other Black women, providing additional challenges for Patient Navigators trying to assist them.
- Black women are consistently more likely to die from breast cancer compared to white women in every county across the Chicago metro area.
- General lack of information for and discussion among Black women about breast cancer.
- Delaying routine screening for years following screening where they experienced painful handling from their provider.
- Very difficult city to travel by public transportation.

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### DALLAS-FORT WORTH, TX

#### DALLAS COUNTY SEE HIGHEST RACIAL DISPARITY IN BREAST CANCER DEATHS IN NORTH TEXAS

##### Cost of Diagnostics, Treatment & Transportation Among Causes

A new in-depth report from Susan G. Komen exposes the tragic racial disparities of breast cancer in North Texas. In every county in the DFW area, the breast cancer mortality rate among Black women is higher than the rate among white women.

Focus group participants cited transportation as a significant barrier. High-quality care and screening may require an hour drive and public transportation is not as robust as in other metropolitan areas. The report identified a need for imaging centers in predominantly Black communities, as well as centers that accept the uninsured.

Patient navigators and providers described cost barriers that delay treatment and competing priorities that often cause patients to choose work over healthcare. As one survivor explained, those with employer-sponsored insurance when diagnosed may lose their insurance over the course of treatment if they're no longer able to work.

“When people with little access to healthcare are finally diagnosed with breast cancer, they may not have a smooth pathway to treatment. They may have challenges with income, childcare, transportation, all kinds of challenges, which are monumental in some cases. As a result, it may take these patients longer to get treated. Providers recommend about 30 days but for these patients, it may be much, much longer—60 to 90 days.”

- Provider

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is a racial divide in DFW resulting in drastic disparities in breast cancer outcomes. Dallas County experiences the greatest disparity among all area counties.
- In Black communities, there is a lack of access to breast imaging centers, especially those that accept the uninsured or those on government insurance.
- The cost of diagnostics, treatment and transportation are driving disparities in outcomes, even when government safety-net hospitals offer financial assistance.
- Most breast cancer resources are located in Dallas County. Many rural counties do not have access to mobile mammography, cancer coalitions or support groups.
- Inequities exist across the breast cancer continuum of care due to economic vulnerability, lack of insurance and personally mediated racism.
- Cost barriers that delay treatment, competing priorities, such as choosing more immediate needs, like working, over healthcare.

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## HOUSTON, TX

### NEW STUDY EXPOSES HOUSTON'S INEQUITY IN BREAST CANCER DEATHS

#### Higher Mortality Rate For Black Women Is Widespread

In 4 out of 5 Houston area counties, Black women are more likely than white women to die from breast cancer, a new study from Susan G. Komen revealed. Economic vulnerability, a large percentage of uninsured and underinsured, and a lower quality of healthcare due to the structural and personal racism were cited as causes.

The report also suggests limited access to, and low utilization of diagnostic procedures results in more instances of delayed diagnosis in the Black Community. Lack of transportation, fear and the high costs of procedures present substantial barriers and how the health system functions may significantly contribute to the underlying inequities in breast cancer outcomes in the Houston area.

“I’m seeing more women who’ve told me there’s so much cancer in their families, friends, and people they know. One lady told me, ‘If it’s there, I just don’t want to know. I can’t deal with knowing.’ So there’s a lot of fear.”

- Harris County Patient Navigator

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Black women are more likely to be diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer than white women in three out of five counties; and they are more likely to die in four out of five.
- While access to free screening exists, Black women often delay screening due to restrictive work policies and fear of losing their jobs.
- Data suggests inequities in the Houston metropolitan area are explained by economic vulnerability, a large number of people without insurance and lower quality of care available in
- High costs of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment and poor or limited insurance as being their biggest barriers.

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## LOS ANGELES, CA

### RACIAL DISPARITY IN BREAST CANCER DEATHS PERVASIVE IN LA AREA

#### Black Women More Likely To Die From The Disease

In Los Angeles and Orange counties, a racial divide in breast cancer outcomes persists. According to a recent study from Susan G. Komen, both counties report higher late-stage breast cancer rates in Black women than white women, as well as significantly higher mortality rates.

The percentage of women over 40 getting mammograms in Los Angeles County is already lower than state and national averages. But Black women face additional challenges—poor access to high-quality screening and treatment, a lack of transportation and the frequent inability to take time off from work.

Cultural factors also come into play, such as the hesitancy to have conversations about illness and the shame associated with a cancer diagnosis. Racism, microaggressions and health care discrimination fuel distrust in the health care system. Fear of painful procedures and mistreatment is a commonly noted barrier.

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“We don’t talk among ourselves. My relatives never shared what illnesses they had. I would never have known that an aunt or whomever had breast cancer or anything else. That was not a topic of discussion, and God forbid they had cancer, the big C. Never”.

- Undiagnosed

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### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Black women in Los Angeles are screened less often than white women and are more likely to be diagnosed with late-stage breast cancers.
- Patients interested in alternative therapies are not granted coverage for them and are often lost in the continuum of care.
- Lack of trustworthy information, cultural fears, feelings of shame or perception of pain serve as barriers to care.
- Black women also noted that time away from supporting family serves as a barrier to care.
- Fear is a major barrier to screening for breast cancer, including not wanting to discuss cancer.

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### MEMPHIS, TN

### MEMPHIS WORST IN THE COUNTRY FOR RACIAL DISPARITY IN BREAST CANCER DEATHS

#### New Report Reveals Black Women More Likely To Die From The Disease

A recent in-depth study from Susan G. Komen exposes shocking racial inequities in breast cancer outcomes in the Memphis area. Although local Black women are more likely to get mammograms and have lower diagnosis rates than their white counterparts, those diagnosed are substantially more likely to die from the disease.

Area providers express concern over the quality of screening in Black neighborhoods but the timeliness of screenings may also be a factor. Many who should be screened early, aren't. And procedures are often delayed by financial concerns, poor access to health care, distrust of the system and family responsibilities, resulting in more late-stage diagnoses with higher mortality rates.

Those in treatment can face daunting challenges; study participants described working hourly jobs with no sick leave time and the stress of maintaining a household during chemo and other intense treatments. Public transportation is not widely accessible in the Memphis MTA, yet most health care resources are concentrated in Shelby County. In both Crittenden County and DeSoto County, 100 percent of the population is medically underserved.

“Where I work, I see women getting diagnosed younger, and younger. They say if you have a family history, a first-degree relative, then you should maybe start early, but a lot of people don't know their family history, so how can you know to get somewhere early to detect it?”

- Undiagnosed

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Area providers express concern over the quality of breast cancer screening in Black neighborhoods.
- In the Memphis metropolitan area, the likelihood of receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, the stage of diagnosis and the likelihood of death from the disease vary along geographical and racial lines.
- While free breast cancer screenings exist, they do not exist in areas where younger Black women are, and providers do not know where to refer their uninsured patients.
- Memphis area women note a historic distrust of the health care system and personal experiences of implicit bias, racism and discrimination and lack of understanding or appreciation of life circumstances and responsibilities.

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## PHILADELPHIA, PA

### NEW STUDY SHINES LIGHT ON RACIAL DISPARITY OF BREAST CANCER

#### Philly's Black Women More Likely To Die From The Disease

While breast cancer screening is readily available within the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Black women aren't reaping the benefits of it. A new in-depth study from Susan G. Komen suggests Black women experience poorer quality of care and more barriers to diagnosis than their white counterparts and suffer higher mortality rates because of it.

Many survivors characterized the care they received as inefficient, inaccessible and lacking empathy. Instances of racism, microaggressions and healthcare discrimination cause widespread distrust in the healthcare system and a cultural shame of illness creates fear and denial.

Economic vulnerability and the lack of awareness of free services may also be a factor. The weight of a breast cancer diagnosis is significant, and community members noted it can mean the difference between someone seeking treatment immediately or delaying.

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“As a kid, you never mentioned cancer. When people died in the family, you didn't know what they died of, because it was hushed. If a person had it, you weren't allowed to touch them either, because you'll catch it.”

- Survivor

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#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Philadelphia and Camden (New Jersey) Counties face the largest disparities in breast cancer mortality rates for Black women.
- While free screening programs exist, Black women do not know where to access them.
- Community members experience poor-quality care and barriers at the diagnosis stage of the breast cancer continuum of care.

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## ST. LOUIS, MO

### BREAST CANCER RACIAL DIVIDE

#### St Louis Black Women Nearly Twice as Likely to Die from Disease

A new study from Susan G. Komen reveals stunning racial inequities in breast cancer outcomes in the St Louis area. Despite being more likely to get screened than white women, Black women in St. Louis City and St. Louis County are substantially more likely to die from the disease.

The lack of affordable insurance is noted as a primary factor. Limits on coverage, high deductibles and copays often force women to choose between health care and day-to-day needs. Missouri's rejection of Medicaid expansion and the closure of a local public hospital also contribute to poor access to screening and care, resulting in more late-stage diagnoses with higher mortality rates.

Segregated neighborhoods and the high cost of transportation also play a significant role. In each of the priority counties within the St. Louis MTA, high-quality diagnostic and treatment facilities tend to be farther away from underserved Black communities. Changing guidelines around breast cancer screening also feed into misconceptions and add to barriers to proactively screen. Participants observed that there are mixed messages across providers, including how often to get a screening mammogram.

“Having no insurance or being underinsured is a large contributing factor to the inability of a woman to get screened routinely and in treatment. Some of the highest breast cancer mortality rates we see are in the inner North County, which has many zip codes where one in four households are uninsured.”

- Provider

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Black women in St. Louis County and St. Louis City are more likely than white women to be screened for breast cancer, but almost twice as likely to die from the disease.
- The four counties with the largest Black populations have the greatest percentage of people who are medically underserved, low-income and experience food insecurities.
- Decades of discriminatory practices have led to striking segregation in the St. Louis MTA
- Lack of insurance and the poor quality of available and affordable insurance programs were principle contributing factors to treatment inequities.

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VIRGINIA BEACH/TIDEWATER, VA

### BREAST CANCER DISCRIMINATES

#### Area Black Women More Likely To Die From Disease

Although Black women in the Tidewater metropolitan area are less likely to get diagnosed with breast cancer than their white counterparts, those who do are substantially more likely to die of the disease, says a new report from Susan G. Komen.

Additional study is needed to fully understand the reasons for the inequity, yet disparities exist across at least half of the cities in the Tidewater MTA, with Suffolk and Chesapeake standing out for having the widest gap residents across all measures.

The study suggests financial barriers, transportation issues, fear and lack of insurance play a role, causing delays in diagnostic procedures and resulting in late-stage diagnoses with higher mortality rates. Focus group participants also report personal experiences of poor care quality, racism and implicit bias based on economic standing and the type of insurance the patient has. This coupled with general economic vulnerability and food insecurity issues may significantly contribute to the underlying inequities in breast cancer outcomes in the area.

“If you go in on a free screening mammogram and they say you have breast cancer, where do you go from there if you don’t have the insurance? Sometimes, it’s the fear of just knowing you may have it and you don’t have the resources after the diagnosis.”

- Portsmouth Undiagnosed

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In four out of the MTA’s eight cities/counties for which there was data, Black women experienced lower incidence rates of breast cancer than white women, but higher mortality rates.
- Suffolk City and Chesapeake City experienced the biggest disparities across all measures.
- The stories of Black women, both survivors and undiagnosed, convey their experience of poor-quality care, racism, microaggressions and health care discrimination.

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### NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA/WASHINGTON, D.C.

#### STEPS AWAY FROM NATION'S LEADERS, BLACK WOMEN MORE LIKELY TO DIE FROM BREAST CANCER

##### **Black Women More Likely to be Diagnosed Late in 5 out of 9 D.C.-area Counties**

Deep and persistent inequities in breast cancer outcomes have been exposed by a new in-depth study from Susan G Komen. Although Black women in the National Capital MTA get screened at similar if not higher rates than white women, they're consistently diagnosed at later stages and die from the disease at higher rates.

The reason for the inequity is unclear, but the study identified several factors that cause many Black women to delay follow-up health care. High out-of-pocket costs for diagnostic procedures are a substantial barrier. Distrust of the healthcare system is widespread. Shifting guidelines for screenings and changes in the referral process cause confusion within the community.

Fear may also play a significant role. Community members and patient navigators described cases in which the patient, their family and their community circle had been so impacted by cancer over the years that they were reluctant to follow up on an abnormal screening. Survivors also reported poorer care for Medicaid insurance and difficulty in getting a diagnosis because their symptoms were dismissed or not seen as urgent.

“Two years ago, I started experiencing my breasts inverting and having pain. The radiologist said that it was just dense tissue. Finally, in February I said, ‘This is too much. I’m experiencing pain, breasts aren’t supposed to invert. There’s something wrong.’ So I went back, the radiologist had a fit. ‘I said, ‘I don’t care. We’re going to find out what’s wrong with me.’ They ordered a biopsy and that’s when it came out that I had Stage Four breast cancer.”

- Survivor

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Black women are more likely than white women to be diagnosed at a later stage of breast cancer in five of nine National Capital area counties.
- Arlington County accounts for the most fatalities for Black women in the metro area, while also accounting for the least fatalities for white women. This suggests high-quality care is available in the county, but it may be unattainable for Black women due to cost, type of insurance or other barriers.
- The majority of Black women in the National Capital area live in Washington, D.C. and Prince George’s County, which lack access to affordable, high-quality care.
- During treatment, women are looking for a point person within their health system to help them make decisions.

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