

Paid Leave for Cancer Screenings: A Community Demonstration Project in New York's Schenectady and Broome Counties

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Background

Over 25,000 New Yorkers are diagnosed with breast, cervical, or colorectal cancer annually and these cancers account for nearly 20% of cancer deaths in the state. Routine screening is recommended for these cancers and can decrease cancer incidence and mortality. Lack of paid sick leave is a potential barrier to obtaining recommended cancer screenings as workers without paid sick leave may skip cancer screening tests. Implementation of organizational policies that provide workers with paid time off for cancer screening may increase cancer screening rates across population groups.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project is to increase uptake of recommended cancer screenings by reducing structural barriers. To achieve this goal, the NYS Department of Health began funding contractors in two counties to implement a demonstration project in January 2013. One objective is to educate local municipalities about the benefits of paid leave for cancer screening and encourage adoption of policies that would provide municipal workers with paid leave to obtain cancer screenings. Project work plans use strategies and activities from a coordinated chronic disease prevention framework to build support for policy change and implementation (Figure 1).

Community and decision maker education raises awareness of and builds support for cancer screening paid leave initiative.



Methods

Contractors routinely report on a set of performance measures and short-term outcomes to demonstrate accountability and document progress towards desired community outcomes. Community outcomes include policy implementation, potential reach of implemented policies, and health behaviors. Community support is measured through county-level public opinion polling.

Figure 1. Activities to Build Community Support for Policy Change



Results

Policy Implementation and Potential Reach: Contractors achieved project objectives, and in both counties one municipality adopted and implemented an expanded paid leave policy for employees to obtain cancer screenings. The policies have the potential to reach over 3,500 workers in both counties.

Health Behavior: To date, one contractor developed a system to track utilization of the paid leave benefit. The system went into effect in 2014 and the number of employees utilizing paid leave to obtain cancer screening nearly tripled in the 2nd six months of 2014 (Table 1). Contractor efforts to promote use of these policies likely contributed to increased utilization by county employees.

Table 1. Number of Broome County Employees Utilizing Paid Leave for Cancer Screenings, 2014

January-June	17
July-December	49
Total	66

Community Support: There is high support for a policy that would require employers to offer all workers paid leave for cancer screenings (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent of Adults in Favor of Policies that would Require Employers to offer Employees Paid Leave for Cancer Screening

NYS	85.1%
Broome	85.9%
Schenectady	84.0%

Source: Siena College Research Institute/NYS Department of Health, 2013

Conclusions

The application of a specific set of strategies has successfully built community and decision maker support for paid leave policies in local counties. The experiences from this project will be used to inform upcoming statewide implementation of a paid leave initiative.