

Health Screenings for Women with Developmental Disabilities: Notes for Social Workers and Case Managers

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The American Cancer Society recommends that all women:

- Receive yearly mammograms beginning at age 40
- Receive Pap tests every 1-2 years after beginning to have vaginal intercourse or by age 21.

Despite this recommendation, women with developmental disabilities are not receiving screenings for breast and cervical cancer.

- ❖ Only 28% of women with developmental disabilities received a Pap test in 2010. 46% of women aged 40+ received a mammogram in 2010.
- ❖ Women with developmental disabilities living in residential settings are four to six times more likely to receive a mammogram or Pap test than women with developmental disabilities living at home with family.
- ❖ African American women with developmental disabilities are six times less likely to have received a mammogram than White women.

Social workers and case managers are in a unique position to support women with developmental disabilities to get screened for cervical and breast cancer. As a social worker or case manager you can:

- Be knowledgeable about your client's receipt of screenings and encourage her to get screened according to clinical guidelines.
- Educate your client and her family about the importance of getting screened.
- Advocate for screenings with doctors, other health professionals, and support staff.
- Include preventive health screenings as a regular topic of discussion in planning meetings.
- Seek out ways to help reduce any anxiety your client may have about health screenings such as practicing deep breathing, listening to music, or having someone accompany her to her appointment.

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