

Surge in Breast Cancer Among Asian American, Pacific Islander Women

New report shows steep increase of breast cancer incidences in AAPI women of all ages, underscores need for improved biomarker testing access in Hawaii.

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[The American Cancer Society \(ACS\)](#) released an [update \[earlier this month\] on breast cancer occurrence](#) and trends in the United States. While the new report finds mortality rates have dropped by 44% since 1989, not all women have benefited from this progress. The report highlighted a continued upward trend in breast cancer incidence with the steepest increase in women younger than 50 years and Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) women of all ages. The release coincides with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network's (ACS CAN) campaign to connect patients with the right treatment at the right time through [increasing access to biomarker testing in Hawaii](#).

Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among women in the U.S. It is also the second-leading cause of death from cancer among women. Only lung cancer kills more women each year. Nearly 1,500 Hawaii residents are expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2024. While incidence rates are rising, breast cancer mortality rates continue to decrease thanks to advances in early detection and treatment, like targeted therapies based on the results of biomarker testing.

In cancer, biomarkers are often used to help determine the best treatment for a patient. Testing involves the analysis of a patient's tissue, blood or other biospecimen for the presence of a biomarker. Unfortunately, not all communities are benefiting from the latest advancements in biomarker testing and precision medicine in part because insurance coverage is failing to keep pace.

Communities of color, patients with lower socioeconomic status, rural communities, and patients receiving care in non-academic medical centers are less likely to receive biomarker testing. ACS CAN is planning to work with the Hawaii State Legislature during the 2025 legislative session to ensure more Hawaiians can access this type of testing.

"The release of this report is alarming for AAPI women in Hawaii," said Cynthia Au, ACS CAN Hawaii Government Relations Director. "Every person should have access to advancements in treatment. Biomarker testing makes it possible for patients more patients to be matched with the

most effective treatments. We are urging our state legislators to heed this report and work with our organization to make a difference for patients in our state by expanding access to biomarker testing.”

During the 2024 legislative session, state lawmakers passed HCR 53 which made Hawaii one step closer to connecting cancer patients and those battling other diseases to guided treatment through biomarker testing. The resolution allows the state auditor to study the social and financial impact of broader insurance coverage of biomarker testing. This resolution is required for the state auditor to conduct a report and allow bills that include certain health insurance changes to move forward. Without action to expand equitable access to biomarker testing, existing disparities in cancer outcomes could be increased as treatments become more targeted.

To date, 20 states have enacted legislation to expand access to biomarker testing consistent with the latest medical and scientific evidence. More than 8,600 Hawaii residents are expected to be diagnosed with cancer in 2024, with more than 2,600 expected to die from the disease.

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