

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC  
20510

February 6, 2024

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

In recognition of the importance of Cervical Health Awareness month, we write to bring to your attention troubling trends regarding cervical cancer and to seek your support in renewed efforts to increase cervical cancer screening rates while maintaining existing recommendations to ensure access to care.

Cervical cancer was once the leading cause of cancer death among women, but over the past 80 years, the rates of cervical cancer deaths have dropped by more than 70 percent due to the introduction of cervical cytology - otherwise known as the Pap test. These rates have improved further with the combination of the human papillomavirus (HPV) test and the Pap test, as well as public education on the importance of cervical cancer screening.

Despite the dramatic reduction in cervical cancer historically, the latest National Cancer Institute (NCI) Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Result Program data show that cervical cancer incidence in women under the age of 50 has been increasing — with the sharpest increase in incidence among women aged 30-34.<sup>[1]</sup> It is estimated that the latest data will show over 14,000 new cases and 4,280 deaths from cervical cancer, annually.<sup>[2]</sup> These statistics are particularly troubling because cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers when women are routinely screened.

Unfortunately, we also have ample evidence from the last several years that rates of cervical cancer and access to screenings are not equal across all populations. Women living in rural areas, as well as Black, Hispanic, and American Indian and Alaska Native women, are

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<sup>[1]</sup> SEER\*Explorer: An interactive website for SEER cancer statistics [Internet]. Surveillance Research Program, National Cancer Institute. (2023, Apr 19). [updated: 2023 Nov 16; cited 2023 Dec 13].

<https://seer.cancer.gov/statistics-network/explorer/>. Data source(s): SEER Incidence Data, November 2022 Submission (1975-2020), [SEER 22 registries](#).

<sup>[2]</sup> American Cancer Society. (n.d.). Cervix Cancer Statistics. American Cancer Society Cancer Statistics Center.

<https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/types/cervix>.

disproportionately impacted by cervical cancer.<sup>[3],[4],[5]</sup> Increasing the rate of cervical cancer screening is a public health priority and has critical implications for addressing costly health disparities. Further, cervical cancer screening rates plummeted by 84 percent during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning too many women still lack access to comprehensive cervical cancer screenings.<sup>[6]</sup>

It is our understanding that the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) is reviewing cervical cancer screening, and proposed guidelines are expected in 2024. We urge caution against changes that would further increase intervals between cervical cancer screenings, increase the recommended age to begin screening, or potentially lead to reduced screening rates and confusion among health care providers and their patients. Such changes could make it less likely that women with already low screening rates, or who only periodically receive screenings, are provided with the comprehensive cervical cancer screenings recommended under current USPSTF guidelines.

We urge you to prioritize maintaining effective, commonsense USPSTF guidelines and support renewed efforts to improve cervical cancer screening education and awareness. Thank you for your ongoing support in maintaining comprehensive cervical cancer screening guidelines.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Roger Marshall  
United States Senator

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<sup>[3]</sup> Shahmoradi Z, Damgacioglu H, Clarke MA, Wentzensen N, Montealegre J, Sonawane K, Deshmukh AA. (2023, October 19). Cervical cancer incidence, diagnosis, and mortality. JAMA Network Open.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2810879>.

<sup>[4]</sup> Yu, L., Sabatino, S., & White, M. (2019, June 6). *Rural–urban and racial/ethnic disparities in invasive cervical cancer incidence in the United States, 2010–2014*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2019/18\\_0447.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2019/18_0447.htm).


<sup>[5]</sup> U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group. U.S. Cancer Statistics Data Visualizations Tool, based on 2022 submission data (1999-2020): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Cancer Institute; released in November 2023 <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dataviz>.

<sup>[6]</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, August 1). Cancer and Covid-19. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/about/covid-19.htm#:~:text=Studies%20Show%20Effects%20on%20Cancer%20Screening&text=During%20April%202020%2C%20breast%20and,they%20did%20before%20the%20pandemic>.



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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



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United States Senator



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