

Need to know

Screening Mammography Guidelines: what patients need to know about mammography guidelines and health insurance coverage

What Guidelines?

Clinical guidelines provide recommendations to guide patient care. They are based on expert reviews of the latest scientific evidence on what works best for most patients. Clinical guidelines are produced by various professional and scientific bodies. After looking at guidelines from the US, UK and Canada, Bermuda is moving towards adopting the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) guidelines. For mammography, the minimum insurance package by law includes screening mammograms within the USPSTF guidelines.

What is the recommendation for mammograms?

For healthy women with no symptoms, no prior diagnosis and no family history, the USPSTF recommends screening mammograms every two years between the ages of 50 and 74 years.

Women with symptoms or who are at high risk (e.g. past diagnosis, immediate family member with breast cancer, used hormones for menopause for 5 years, etc.) should talk to their doctor to determine the best course of action. Your personal characteristics and circumstances will determine what is best for you.

Why guidelines for mammography?

Bermuda has had generous mammography screening over the years, but evidence in the US and Europe shows that the current screening levels are not optimal and lead to over-diagnosis. Current screening practices for healthy women can result in unnecessary treatment and needless stress.

Of the women screened in Bermuda in 2013/14, 30% were under the age of 50 and 6% were aged 75 to 93. Based on international evidence, and excluding the 15% estimated women defined as high risk, there are many women receiving limited health benefit from the current, intense level of screening. Conversely, some women who should be having mammograms are currently neglecting screening.

Researchers and physicians internationally, and physician leaders in Bermuda, support the USPSTF guideline for screening mammography to provide the greatest absolute decrease in breast cancer deaths.

What does this mean?

Introducing standardized guidelines will help to ensure women receive the right level of care consistently. If Bermuda adheres to these screening guidelines we can create better population health.

What does this mean for me as a patient?

Your health insurance covers screening mammograms within the USPSTF guidelines or with a physician referral for women at risk.



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