

Schenectady County Workers Get More Recommended Cancer Screenings after Leave Expansion

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A National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Success Story

Summary

The Schenectady County Public Health Services (SCPHS) educated county government decision-makers about the potential benefits of increasing access to recommended cancer screenings. Effective January 2015, a resolution granted Schenectady County municipal employees an additional four hours of paid leave per year to undergo any type of cancer screening. As of December 2015, 1,085 full-time employees, including cancer survivors, received recommended cancer screenings which help to prevent and detect cancer or reoccurrence earlier to save lives.

Challenge

Prior to the resolution, all county and state employees in New York State (NYS) were entitled to up to four hours of paid leave annually for breast and prostate screenings (NYS Civil Service Law sections 159-b and 159-c). However, only 10% of SCPHS employees used this benefit. The NYS Civil Service Law did not include time off for other types of cancer screenings, such as cervical and colorectal cancer, even though early detection and treatment of these cancers dramatically improves health outcomes.



Research indicates that employees without access to paid sick leave are more likely to forego recommended cancer screenings than those with paid sick leave. Lack of paid leave time is a potential barrier to obtaining preventive cancer screenings at recommended intervals.

Solution

The New York State Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (NYS CCCP) funded SCPHS to educate Schenectady County decision-makers about the potential benefit of expanding the county's paid leave policy. SCPHS used strategies and activities from a coordinated chronic disease prevention framework that focused on educating communities, organizations and government decision-makers. The expansion to eight hours increased the leave time employees were permitted for cancer screenings and also covered additional screenings for cervical and colorectal cancer.

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To learn more about the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp.



NATIONAL
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PROGRAM

Collaborating to Conquer Cancer

Results

SCPHS is considered a model worksite in the state because of its success in securing an improved paid leave policy for recommended cancer screenings. After the policy was enacted, over 636 hours were used for cancer screenings, a 69% increase, and 28 departments used the policy, a 33% increase. In 2015, 181 female and 20 male employees used the benefit, as compared to the 134 female and 3 male employees who used it in 2013.

The expanded policy benefits employees and may save the county health insurance costs. Employees diagnosed with cancer cost 5 times as much to insure. For example, yearly health care costs for an employee diagnosed with cancer total \$16,000, while health care costs to insure an employee without cancer are \$3,000 annually. These costs savings support the need for expanded policy leave for county employees and promote the message that early screening saves lives.

“Since being diagnosed with endometrial cancer 3 years ago, I undergo a Pap test each year to prevent the possibility of the cancer spreading or reoccurring. I am very thankful for the paid leave policy so that I am able to get this screening.”

Lynn Streifert
Schenectady County Public
Health Services

Future Directions

The County’s Human Resources (HR) Department continues to track how paid leave time is being used to understand where future education may be needed. Also, the HR Department and SCPHS employees working on this project developed tools such as “Why You Should Be Screened” fact sheets and laminated bookmarks to share with employees during their insurance open enrollment period. The SCPHS is providing technical assistance to other municipalities that are interested in implementing paid leave policies for cancer screenings for their employees.

Your Involvement is Key

The NYS CCCP and 27 organizations worked with employers in upstate New York to promote and implement policies that support paid time off for cancer screenings. Improving paid leave policies for employees to receive cancer screenings can lead to a healthier work force, increased productivity, and decreased health care costs. For a copy of Schenectady County’s expanded paid leave policy and/or related forms and materials to share with a local employer, contact SCPHS at (518) 386-2824.

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