Purpose

Using a community-based approach, the purpose of this study is to explore if low-income women with disabilities living in urban areas have reduced access to and participation in secondary prevention services for breast and cervical cancer. The goal of this study is to identify and understand barriers to cancer screening in order to increase access to these services for women with disabilities.

The specific aims of the study are to:

1. Determine the frequency of pelvic exams and mammograms among low-income women with disabilities.
2. Explore how socioeconomic status, ethnicity, living situation, location of health care providers, insurance status, type of disability, and severity of disability affect access to and participation in pelvic examinations and mammograms.
3. Examine how external factors (informational barriers, attitudinal barriers, and environmental barriers) affect access to and participation in cancer screening services.

Background

Healthy People 2010 reports that women with disabilities lack access to health services and medical care. In particular, health screening services for female cancers, such as pelvic examinations and mammograms, may be particularly difficult to obtain. Women with disabilities may encounter attitudinal, environmental, economic, and informational barriers. This may be intensified among low-income women, resulting in more advanced cancer at diagnosis and lower survival rates, creating enormous personal, family, and societal costs.

Methods

Study Design
- Descriptive, cross-sectional pilot study
- Mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative data)
- Framework of structural barriers is the conceptual guide for the study (e.g., economic, social, policy, organizational)
- Criterion-based purposive sampling

Study Population
1. Women who have a disability
2. Ages 18 to 65 years of age
3. Annual income <20,000
4. Able to respond to questions in English
5. Reside in an urban area

Community Partners
The study is being conducted in collaboration with two key community partners:
1. Alaska Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program in the Division of Public Health, Section of Women’s, Children’s and Family Health
2. Center for Human Development, University of Alaska Anchorage

Types of Health Care Coverage of Participants
- Medicaid/Medicare (n=4)
- Indian Health Service (n=3)
- Private, Employer-based (n=1)
- Alaska Chronic & Acute Medical Assistance (n=1)

Had a Mammogram in the Past Year (>40 years) (n=8)
- Yes (n=5)
- No (n=3)
- N/A (<40) (n=2)

Perspectives on Screening
- “Too many other concerns.”
- “Dealing with too many things.”
- “The clinic personnel are unfamiliar with my abilities and treat me like I have a cognitive disability.”

Next Steps
- Work with community partners, organizations, and participants to expand identification and recruitment efforts
- Move to the next phase to incorporate women with developmental disabilities in the target population
- Extend outreach to health care and service providers