

Costs of Colorectal Cancer Screening

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Reed Walton] Screening for colorectal cancer is important for people between the ages of 50 and 75. Screening tests can help prevent cancer or find cancer earlier, when it's easier to treat. But only 62 percent of people in that age group are up-to-date with their colorectal cancer screening. Among people who have no health insurance, only about 25 percent are up-to-date.

I'm Reed Walton and I'm here with Dr. Florence Tangka, a senior health economist with the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, to discuss CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program and some new studies about how the program works. First, Florence, tell me a little bit about CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program.

[Florence Tangka] Between 2009 and 2015, CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program funded 25 states and four tribal organizations to do two things. First, the program worked with hospitals, clinics, and doctors to put in place strategies that are proven to get more people screened for colorectal cancer. We call this "promoting screening." Second, it paid for screening services for people who have low income and have no insurance.

[Reed Walton] And you just published new studies about the Colorectal Cancer Control Program, which can help let people who want to start and run programs like this understand how much it costs. Can you break these studies down for us?

[Florence Tangka] Sure. Two studies are about how the states and tribal organizations funded by CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program used the money they were awarded. The third study is about how much it cost patients to get the tests. The first paper looked at the cost of using proven strategies to increase colorectal cancer screening, something that has not been studied before. The second paper looked at the cost of paying for screening tests and the cost of other services that are needed to make sure the screening process runs smoothly. Finally, the third paper looked at the cost to the person actually getting screened and the person who came along with them. For example, if someone had to take time off of work to get screened, they might have to go without getting paid for that period of time.

[Reed Walton] And what did you learn from these studies?

[Florence Tangka] We found that the program did use the strategies that are proven to work in order to get more people screened. More importantly, we found that the cost to the program to screen one person with these strategies was small, and got smaller as more people got screened. We also found that indirect costs to support the screening process, like patient navigation and data collection, were high, which is important to know when planning a program. Lastly, we found that it does cost patients money to get screened, and people who don't make much money would have to decide between getting screened and other basic needs.

[Reed Walton] And finding out how much it costs to start and run a colorectal cancer screening program can help more people get screened?

[Florence Tangka] Yes! Now that we have a better understanding of how much we have to spend to get this type of program up and running, that can help us plan and run better programs. In the future, we'll find those programs that did the most cost-effective job; the ones that get the most people screened with the amount of money they are awarded. Then we can pass that knowledge on to other public health programs to help them make the best use of their money to get as many people as possible screened.

[Reed Walton] So this model could be used for screening programs for other cancers besides colorectal?

[Florence Tangka] Definitely, Reed. Finding out about the costs of creating these programs can help screening programs for breast and cervical cancer estimate their costs and make their money go further to get more people screened.

[Reed Walton] That's a lot of good information for a good cause. Florence, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. For more information on colorectal cancer and programs across the country, go to cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.