

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month



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Since October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I would like to take some time to increase understanding about this subject. According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women other than skin cancer.

Let me lay out some harsh statistics about this serious disease—not to scare you, but to get your attention. Approximately 13 percent, or 1 in 8 women, will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in their lifetime; approximately 3 percent, or 1 in 39 women, will die from breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society estimates for 2021 are:

- Approximately 281,550 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in women.
- About 49,290 new cases of ductal carcinoma in situ (aka DCIS) will be diagnosed.
- About 43,600 women will die from breast cancer.

Breast cancer occurs almost entirely in women, but men can get breast cancer, too.

Making time for regular preventive care and taking charge of your future is a great defense. While you may not be able to avoid a breast cancer diagnosis, early detection may be the key to success and help with an effective treatment plan.

Let's start with a risk factor overview. The first associated risk factor is age. Unfortunately, we can't stop the hands of time, and studies show that as you age, the risk increases. Other risk factors may include family history, genetics, personal history, obesity, alcohol, tobacco use and more. As you can see, although you cannot control all risks, there are some areas that you can influence by making healthy lifestyle choices.

Next, let's talk about the symptoms and what you can do to be proactive. First, please don't ignore what your body is telling you. If you suspect something is wrong, please see a medical professional.

This is not an inclusive list and symptoms may vary, but possible warning signs could include:

- Breast pain
- A lump in the breast or under the armpit
- Nipple bleeding or discharge
- Redness or swelling
- Unusual changes (i.e., pulling in of the nipple, changes in the breast size or shape, irritation or dimpling of the breast skin, etc.)

Knowing what symptoms to look for is important, but it does not take the place of having regular mammograms and other screening tests. Screening tests can help find breast cancer early before any symptoms appear. Finding breast cancer early gives you a better chance of successful treatment.

Other preventive measures include self-check breast exams and scheduling regular medical checkups. The NALC Health Benefit Plan covers routine mammograms for women age 35 and older as follows:

- Age 35 to 39, one during this five-year period
- Age 40 and older, one every calendar year

Always talk with your medical provider regarding which preventive screenings are right for you. If you have questions about coverage, make sure to reach out to one of our customer service representatives. A healthier you is a better you.

Coming soon

The new Health Benefit Plan member portal and mobile application are on the way!

Although the exact rollout date has not been finalized, we are planning to launch the first public version during October or November. Refining the user experience to make these platforms into useful tools you will love to use has been our goal from the start.

The features will include:

- **Single sign-on**—Using a single username and password to log into the new member portal will permit you to connect directly to each of our partner sites (Cigna, CVS, Optum and American Well) without having to provide a separate username and password.
- **Online claim information**—Securely logging into the member portal or mobile app, members will be able to access up-to-date claim information, including out-of-pocket and deductible status.
- **Personal health record**—The new member portal includes a redesigned personal health record that makes it easier for you to access and decide what important personal health information you want to include to share with your providers.
- **Secure messaging**—Once logged into the portal or app, members will be able to send messages securely to the Plan. This includes the ability to securely upload documents such as birth and marriage certificates, Medicare or other insurance coverage ID cards to keep the Plan informed on changes that may affect coverage.

We are excited about this new release and will keep you updated as the plans unfold.