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Town Square

Breast cancer awareness

Planned Parenthood offers screenings to local, poor women

In recognition of October as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, public awareness campaigns across Texas are encouraging women to make regular breast exams a priority. Undoubtedly, regular checkups and early detection save lives.

In 2010, about 123,000 women were screened for breast cancer at Planned Parenthood health centers in Texas, including 6,341 in Waco. That year, 609 low-income women accessed mammography screening through Planned Parenthood of Central Texas; 125 women accessed diagnostic mammograms; and breast cancer was detected in 20 women here.

With about 2.2 million uninsured women in Texas — the highest rate of uninsured women in the U.S. — it is essential that women have access to affordable, preventive health care, including breast-cancer screenings. Women who don't have health insurance or live in poverty are much more likely to postpone care and forgo important preventive care such as breast-cancer screenings.

Unfortunately, at a time when families and women need help the most, the Texas Legislature this past session approved a budget that slashed funding for family planning programs by 66 percent. These programs provide 170,000 low-income women with life-saving breast exams each year. Sadly, these budget cuts directly reduce access to breast health, and further restrict access to life-saving breast-cancer screenings for low-income women, putting thousands of Texas women



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at risk. Women who turn to Planned Parenthood for their annual health screenings might be your neighbor who lacks health insurance or a coworker or a family member.

The American Cancer Society recently estimated that 15,000 Texas women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year and 2,620 moms, daughters, sisters and wives will be lost to it. Breast-cancer screenings help detect breast cancer in its earliest stages and survival rates are nearly nine times greater when it is detected early.

As the only Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening (BCCS) provider in the Waco area, Planned Parenthood has been able to expand access to breast health care for thousands of women in Central Texas. The breast health programs at Planned Parenthood have increased access to screening and diagnostic mammography. Women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancers have been provided case management services and access to Medicaid. These women would not otherwise qualify for this assistance without access to BCCS.

Despite deplorable cuts to family planning programs, Planned Parenthood is still here to provide affordable preventive care, to help women stay healthy, and to ensure that all women have access to breast-cancer screenings 12 months a year.

Felicia Chase Goodman is director of community affairs for Planned Parenthood of Central Texas.