

Dismantling women's cancer coverage could prove deadly, Gov. Rauner

By: ANNE MARIE MURPHY April 07, 2015

Anyone unfortunate enough to be diagnosed with cancer knows the feeling of a ticking clock and the urgent need for access to treatment, for time is not your friend.

It was with dismay that we at the Metropolitan Chicago Breast Cancer Task Force, an organization committed to saving women's lives by eliminating disparities in survival from breast cancer, read of Gov. Bruce Rauner's proposed 71 percent cut to the Illinois breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnosis program for uninsured women. We are further troubled by the proposed elimination of the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program.

IBCCP helps thousands of uninsured women get free mammograms, Pap tests and diagnostic followup when necessary. This ensures that breast or cervical cancer can be detected at its earliest stage when most easily and effectively treated, often through the state's treatment program.

The IBCCP has been underfunded for years. The task force and our partners have rolled up our sleeves to ameliorate the funding gap—we've raised funds, supplemented programs and asked hospitals to pitch in by donating free mammograms. Currently, the task force navigates approximately 1,500 women annually through our [Beyond October](#) program.

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However, a cut of this magnitude cannot be absorbed by local charities. It is too great, in too short a time and is particularly challenging given hospitals already are faced with huge cuts in Medicaid funding. It is particularly unfortunate given that we know these programs are working. In October, the task force released a [study](#) that reported for the first time a decrease in breast cancer disparities for African-American women here in Chicago. The Rauner cuts will turn back the progress made to save lives.

We realize the state faces serious budget challenges, but the idea that we would consider disenrolling women in active breast or cervical cancer treatment and tell them to find other insurance options irrespective of the delays is unconscionable. Not only will this potentially cause them mortal harm, but it also will drive up treatment costs. Early-stage cancers generally are much less expensive to treat compared with later-stage cancers. A cancer not found because a screening program was dismantled is not a cancer avoided—it is a treatable cancer turned lethal.

The clock is ticking, and we hope that as the governor considers the budget choices ahead, he reconsiders these deadly cuts.

Anne Marie Murphy is executive director of the [Metropolitan Chicago Breast Cancer Task Force](#).