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First Lady Patricia Blagojevich urges Illinois women to Tell a Friend and get screened as part of statewide breast cancer awareness effort

Tell a Friend effort informs women about the importance of cancer screenings during October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month; Illinois is first state in the nation to ensure all women who need access to screenings and treatment can get it

CHICAGO— After Governor Rod R. Blagojevich made Illinois the first and only state in the nation to make sure all women who need access to potentially life-saving cancer screenings and treatment can get it, First Lady Patricia Blagojevich is reinforcing this message by urging Illinois women to get screened and *Tell a Friend* about the importance of getting screened. Joined by Dr. Funmi Olopade — one of the nation’s top cancer researchers - and a group of Illinois women, Mrs. Blagojevich today launched the *Tell a Friend* campaign encouraging men and women alike to help spread the word for women to take charge of their health and get breast and cervical cancer screenings during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Effective October 1, Gov. Blagojevich made sure all women who need access to potentially life-saving cancer screenings and treatment could get it by expanding the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (IBCCP) to all uninsured women in Illinois. This expansion makes it possible for more than 260,000 women in Illinois to qualify for free cancer screenings and affordable treatment when they need them, regardless of income.

“It’s clear and simple: when it comes to breast cancer, early detection saves lives. During National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and throughout the year we should make an effort to tell the women we most care about in our lives to get screened,” said Mrs. Blagojevich. “If you tell your friends, and they tell their friends, we will help spread the word not just about early detection but also about the fact that now in Illinois, thanks to the Governor’s initiative women have access to the critical preventative services and treatments that could save many lives. So please tell your friend, your wife, your mom, your daughter, your sister, your co-worker, your teacher. *Tell a Friend* and encourage the women you know and love to take charge and get screened.”

“Breast cancer claims the lives of too many women in Illinois and across the nation. As a doctor and researcher, once I identify a high-risk patient I develop a plan focused on prevention. Screenings are a key part of the plan, but they will be most effective when more and more women know about them. I want to thank Governor Blagojevich for expanding a program that will help make sure women who need access to free screenings and affordable treatments get them, and I especially want to thank Patti Blagojevich for taking the lead in telling women to Tell a Friend about the critical importance of getting screened, because early detection saves lives,” said Dr. Funmi I. Olopade, MD, FACP, Professor of Medicine and Human Genetics, and Director of the Cancer Risk Clinic at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Through the *Tell a Friend* campaign launched by the First Lady women will be offered more than word-of-mouth to help spread the word about breast cancer prevention. By logging in to www.cancerscreening.illinois.gov, and clicking on the *Tell a Friend* tab, a person can fill out a personalized e-card that is then emailed to the person’s friends. There’s no limit to the number of e-cards a person can email, and the recipient will receive detailed information about IBCCP and how to sign up for the program.

According to data from the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women, except for skin cancers. The chance of developing invasive breast cancer at some time in a woman's life is about 1 in 8. It is estimated that in 2007 about 178,480 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed among women in the United States. Women living in North America have the highest rate of breast cancer in the world. At this time there are about 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.

In Illinois, the most recent statistics show 8,604 women were diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer in 2003. That same year, 2,057 women died from breast or cervical cancer in the state. It is estimated that almost 9,000 women will be diagnosed with either breast or cervical cancer this year, and approximately 1,700 will die. But, when breast cancer is diagnosed early, the five-year survival rate is 98 percent according to the American Cancer Society. The survival rate drops to 26 percent when breast cancer is diagnosed later and it has progressed.

Launched in 1995, the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (IBCCP) has provided almost 183,000 screenings – more than 109,000 of those screenings have been provided since 2003 under the Blagojevich administration. Before the expansion announced today, uninsured women only qualified if their incomes were under 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is about \$52,000 per year for a family of four.

As of October 1, 2007, more than 260,000 more women are now eligible for screening and treatment through the IBCCP. All uninsured women between the ages of 40 and 64 will qualify for mammograms and breast exams, and uninsured women between 35 and 64 will qualify for pelvic exams and Pap tests. On a case-by-case basis, younger, symptomatic women who meet the guidelines are considered for the program. The screening program is free.

This is the third time Gov. Blagojevich has made changes to benefit women in need of breast and cervical screenings. Previously, if a woman was eligible for IBCCP but was diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer outside of the program, she was not eligible for treatment. But last year the Governor expanded the program to allow women who met IBCCP eligibility requirements, but were diagnosed outside the IBCCP sites, to go straight into the treatment program through the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. This gave women more choices and also avoided penalizing women who did not know about the program but who were screened and diagnosed by their doctor, community health center or other health care facility.

Uninsured women diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer will qualify for comprehensive healthcare coverage provided by Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) as long as they need treatment for breast or cervical cancer. Women diagnosed with a pre-cancerous cervical cancer condition who need follow-up diagnostic tests will also qualify for HFS coverage to determine whether they actually have cancer. Healthcare coverage will include doctor visits, inpatient and outpatient hospital care, emergency services, prescription drugs and more. Women who need treatment will pay modest co-payments for doctor visits, brand name prescription drugs and inpatient stays.

Women can find out how to get breast and cervical cancer screening and treatment by logging onto www.cancerscreening.illinois.gov or by calling the Women's Health-Line at 1-888-522-1282 or for TTY (hearing impaired use only), 1-800-547-0466. Information on IBCCP and other women's health and programs can also be found on the IDPH website, www.idph.state.il.us.