Op-Ed: *Our State's Commitment to Improving Breast Cancer*

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time to join together and call attention to the effects of breast cancer as well as its impact on the most vulnerable populations across the country. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. An according to the National Cancer Institute's report, an estimated 287,850 women will be newly diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States, and an estimated 43,250 women are projected to lose their lives from it this year alone.[1]

In <insert state>, approximately <xx> women will receive a breast cancer diagnosis this year. This includes women between the ages of: [may insert state-level data then stratify by age group based on available data]

Breast Cancer and Low-SES Risk Factors

Upon closer examination, breast cancer incidence (new cases), survivorship and mortality rates continue to vary or differ significantly by socioeconomic factors (income, education, health insurance coverage) as well as geography within states, across regions and nationwide. Cancer survival or survivorship is typically described in terms of relative survival, which is a measure of life expectancy among cancer patients compared to that among the general population of the same age, race, and gender.[2]

As with most cancers, populations with low socioeconomic status (SES) characteristics, such as low income, low levels of education, and lack of or inadequate health insurance coverage, may have additional risk factors for breast cancer. Reports reveal that cancer mortality rates are higher in counties with high levels of current poverty. In addition, poverty with persistent poverty face social, structural (including transportation) and behavioral challenges that may contribute to residents becoming more vulnerable to cancer risks or higher rates of cancer disparities associated with a late-stage or advanced stage cancer diagnosis.[3]

To reverse these trends impacting vulnerable populations (including low-income women) in the state of [name of state]
[may insert 1-2 examples of state, county or local-level programmatic strategies, partnerships, collaborations, policy-related initiatives, health system interventions, community engagement activities, activities to address transportation or other social determinants of health, and/or social media campaigns implemented or planned to support Breast Cancer Awareness Month]

Populations with low-SES characteristics often experience barriers to breast cancer screening that could detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat. Across the country, an estimated 65% of women aged 45 and older were up to date with American Cancer Society recommendations for breast cancer screenings in 2019.[4] In <insert state>, <xx>% of women aged 45 and over were up to date with mammography screenings overall and approximately % of uninsured women aged 45 years and older were up to date with mammography screenings.

However, breast cancer screening rates are not the same for all women. For instance, only 36% of uninsured women aged 45 and older are up to date on mammograms. Women who have less education or who have recently immigrated to the United States are also less likely to be up to date on breast cancer screenings.

To improve the breast cancer health of women overall (including low-income women) in the state of [name of state]
[may insert 1-2 examples of state, county or local-level programmatic strategies, partnerships, collaborations, policy-related initiatives, health system interventions, community engagement activities, activities to address transportation or other social determinants of health, and/or social media campaigns implemented or planned to support Breast Cancer Awareness Month]

And in the state of [insert name of state] we remain committed improving the breast cancer health of women (including low-income women) and throughout the year.

References:
1. National Cancer Institute (NCI) Cancer Stat Facts: Female Breast Cancer accessed at: https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/breast.html
2. American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2022. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2022.
3. Moss JL, Pinto CN, Srinivasan S, Cronin KA, Croyle RT. Persistent Poverty and Cancer Mortality Rates: An Analysis of County-Level Poverty Designations. Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev. 2020 Oct;29(10):1949-1954. doi: 10.1158/1055-9965.EPI-20-0007. PMID: 32998949; PMCID: PMC7534551.
4. American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2022. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2022.

Resources (National):
1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) at: https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/screenings.htm

2. National Cancer Institute (NCI) Cancer Support Services Directory at: https://supportorgs.cancer.gov/home.aspx?js=1

3. National Football League (NFL) and American Cancer Society (ACS) Launch New Cancer Screening Platform as Part of Crucial Catch Initiative https://operations.nfl.com/updates/football-ops/nfl-and-acs-launch-new-cancer-screening-platform-as-part-of-crucial-catch-initiative/

4. Affordable Care Act (ACA) Preventive Care Benefits for Women: https://www.healthcare.gov/preventive-care-women/

Resources (State/County/ Partnership):
[may list free resources: state specific, multi-county or county specific, resources funded by the private sector, non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, etc.]