

WHO Global Breast Cancer Initiative

Breast cancer awareness month

Theme: No-one should face breast cancer alone

October 2024

Background

Breast cancer is the most common cancer globally with around 2.3 million new cases every year. It represents one in eight cancer cases in both sexes and a quarter of all cancers in women¹ with 70% mortality occurring in resource constrained settings. Health system barriers and patient level factors with low levels of awareness and knowledge are contributing to low uptake of early detection services, with resultant late-stage diagnoses and poor outcomes. In many resource-constrained settings, breast cancer affects a relatively younger population significantly contributing to premature mortality and maternal orphans. Efforts to mitigate breast cancer have significant implications for addressing gender and socioeconomic disparities as well as sustainable development goals and in particular, the SDG 3.4 target to reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), and SDG 3.8 towards universal health coverage (UHC).

Overview

The World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Breast Cancer Initiative (GBCI) in 2021 to reduce mortality rates by 2.5% per year to 2040 through three key pillars of action on health promotion for early detection, timely diagnosis; and comprehensive breast cancer management. The breast cancer awareness month (BCAM) is celebrated globally every October to build awareness about breast cancer, highlight the importance of early detection, timely diagnosis and comprehensive treatment and support for breast cancer patients. It provides an opportunity for stakeholders to network, review progress, reflect and renew commitments in tackling the disease. Working with its partners, the GBCI seeks to utilize this platform to mainstream breast cancer as a global health priority, create awareness and advocacy and build momentum to address the existing disparities and challenges across the care continuum for breast cancer.

¹ Heer E., Harper A., Escandor N., Sung H., McComarck V., Fidler – Benaoudia M.M. Global burden and trends in premenopausal and postmenopausal breast cancer: A population-based study. *Lancet Global Health* 2020;8 (8): e1027-e1037.

Objectives

1. To promote advocacy, awareness, social mobilization and behaviour change communication on breast cancer.
2. To provide a platform for knowledge exchange, multisectoral collaboration, action and renewed commitments for achieving GBCI key performance indicators by Member States.
3. To launch the breast cancer patient navigation brief and knowledge action portal.
4. To encourage focused country policy dialogues on improving breast cancer service delivery, monitoring and evaluation at all levels of care.

Participants

Breast cancer awareness month will be convened in the month of October and will bring together participants across all board including:

- WHO headquarters, regional and country offices
- representatives from ministries of health
- development and multilateral partners
- various private sector organizations associated with breast cancer
- nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions and philanthropic organizations involved breast cancer and integrated women's health programmes
- persons with lived experiences
- civil society groups.