

Women in predominantly low-income communities often do not get mammograms or learn about early detection of breast cancer and its symptoms, putting them at a higher risk for the disease. Touchette Regional Hospital, a safety net hospital serving impoverished communities, is addressing the issue through its START NOW Mammography and Breast Cancer Awareness Program.

The program is for women and men who are 40 years old and older in St. Clair, Madison and Clinton counties. START NOW's ultimate goal is to save lives. The program helps people navigate their breast health options and locate support services, including financial and emotional assistance, at no cost.

Since its inception in 2008, START NOW has led more than 17,000 people through the mammogram screening process. In 2019:

- 1,398 women received services and completed screening mammograms; and
- 35% of the women required additional diagnostic services.

Mortality statistics show the program saves lives: For the East Side Health District, which includes Centreville and East St. Louis, annual deaths due to breast cancer have decreased more than 30% since START NOW began.

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