

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Releases Draft Screening Recommendations

The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) has posted for public comment a draft recommendation statement for breast cancer screening. The panel says the decision to start screening mammography in women prior to age 50 years should be an individual one. The Task Force recommends that women ages 50 to 74 receive screening mammography every two years. For women 75 and older, the panel says current science is inadequate to recommend for or against screening.

Below are comments from **Richard C. Wender, M.D.**, chief cancer control officer of the American Cancer Society in response to the news.

"The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) evaluated the evidence that has emerged since its last update (2009) and has reconfirmed its conclusion that mammography reduces breast cancer deaths for women 40 and older. The panel recommends that all women ages 50 to 74 be screened every 2 years, giving this recommendation a 'B' rating. The panel concluded that the benefits of screening women in their 40s are greater than the harms but that the difference is small. For this reason, the panel gave screening women in their 40s a 'C' rating.

"A 'C' rating is not a recommendation against mammography. In 2012, the USPSTF changed the definition of a 'C' rating to clarify that it means a woman should make an individualized decision with her doctor about whether to start mammography in her 40s based on her values, preferences, and health history. Nonetheless, coverage for screenings that receive a 'C' rating from USPSTF is not mandated under the Affordable Care Act.

"While empowering women to make an informed decision about screening is laudable and something that the American Cancer Society also recommends, we are concerned that the 'C' rating might lead to coverage for fewer women and more out of pocket costs for women in their 40s. Costs should not be a deterrent to women who otherwise would seek to have a mammogram.

"It's important to remember that these are draft guidelines being posted for public comment. The American Cancer Society, working with its advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), strongly supports coverage of breast cancer screening for women in their 40s, and will work to ensure that coverage remains available for screening when a woman and her doctor decide it is in her best interest."
