



A MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATION  
FIGHTING CANCER TOGETHER



# INVESTING IN THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AT WORK

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How employers in low-resource settings  
can tackle cancer as part of a broader  
approach to women's health



[bupa.com/cancer](https://bupa.com/cancer)  
[uicc.org](https://uicc.org)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Why taking a broad approach to women's health at work makes good business sense

The high burden of breast and cervical cancers in low-resource settings is largely unrecognised. The fact is that women in low-resource settings suffer disproportionately from these cancers due to a lack of detection at an early stage and poor access to quality cancer services. As a result very often women are diagnosed with advanced disease that is not responsive to curative treatment. As well as the emotional trauma, there are also consequences for employers - major interruptions to workforce participation apply to both women diagnosed with cancer and their caregivers. In Nigeria, for example, 62% of women with breast cancer or cervical cancer report their inability to work, while 33% report that their illness disrupted a relative's work.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the workplace provides a tremendous opportunity to meet women's comprehensive health needs during her working years by delivering integrated workplace solutions that go beyond maternal health and family planning to incorporate cancer and other non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention, early detection and support for women living with cancer into existing programmes and services.<sup>2</sup> Early detection has proved to be extremely effective in reducing the number of deaths from breast and cervical cancers – recent findings suggest survival is three times higher when cancer is diagnosed early.<sup>3</sup> This means an investment in workplace initiatives to prevent cancer and detect it early can result in productivity gains from higher lifetime hours worked (length of the productive period) and less time away for care.

This guide has been produced to assist employers to understand the value of investing in workplace solutions that empower women to reduce their risk of cancer and detect it early, as well as support women with a cancer diagnosis to return to work. The resource provides guidance on proven workplace interventions for tackling breast and cervical cancers, as well as examples to help employers create a programme that meets the comprehensive health needs of women in their workforce.



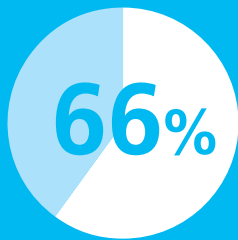
*“Investing in women's health makes great business sense and helps enhance productivity, reduce absenteeism and lower turnover rates. There are also positive ripple effects of workplace wellness policies, since women who are supported in the workplace to improve their personal health also contribute to improving the health of their families and communities.”*

**Melissa Rendler-Garcia, Special Advisor, UICC and Member of the Taskforce on Women and NCDs**

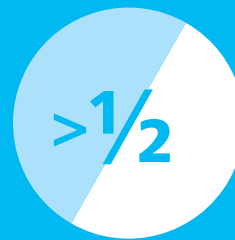
# BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCERS MATTER TO BUSINESSES IN LOW-RESOURCE SETTINGS

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## BREAST & CERVICAL CANCERS DIMINISH THE WORKFORCE



66% of breast cancer cases are diagnosed before age 54



More than half of all new cases of cervical cancer are in women under the age of 50<sup>4</sup>

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## WOMEN'S HEALTH PROGRAMMES IN THE WORKPLACE DELIVER A RETURN ON INVESTMENT<sup>5</sup>



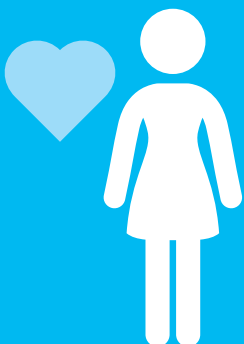
Women's health promotion programmes targeted to factory workers have reported a return on investment (ROI) as high as 4:1



Health-related absenteeism is reduced by up to 50%<sup>6</sup>

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## WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS EXIST FOR BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCERS IN LOW-RESOURCE SETTINGS



### EMPLOYERS CAN:

**REDUCE**  
cancer risk factors.

**PROMOTE**  
awareness of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer.

**ENCOURAGE**  
take up of cervical screening.

**SUPPORT**  
a successful transition back to work after cancer treatment.

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# REDUCE

## cancer risk factors

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Even if your workplace has existing programmes in place to provide general and reproductive health education, it is important that internal communications link these activities with education materials around how to prevent cancer.

**Employers can empower women to take actions that will reduce their cancer risk, including:**

### Encourage breastfeeding in working mothers

Breastfeeding has health benefits for mothers and their babies including a reduced risk for breast and ovarian cancers and obesity. Among mothers the risk of breast cancer decreases by 4% for every 12 months of breastfeeding.<sup>7</sup> Breastfed babies also benefit from reduced risks from diarrhea and respiratory infections as well as a protective effect on the incidence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and childhood obesity. Guidance for employers on how to create breastfeeding friendly workplaces is available in the Healthy Workplaces guide, 'Tackling breast cancer in the workplace - a win for everyone'.



World Breastfeeding Week 2015 focused on 'Women and work – Let's make it work' which emphasises the need for better support systems and policies to enable working mothers to breastfeed.

### Support female workers to maintain a healthy weight and keep physically active

Maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active can reduce the risk of many cancers. Overall a third of common cancers could be prevented by a healthy diet, being physical active and maintaining a healthy body weight. Research shows that being a healthy weight could prevent 16% of breast cancers in the UK, 14% in Brazil and 12% in China.<sup>8</sup>

Employers can play a role in improving nutrition awareness and access to healthy food choices and physical activity at work by:

- *Provide nutrition education:* Nutrition awareness amongst female workers in low resource settings can be low. Educational and motivational materials (brochures, posters) can be used to convey nutrition information and tips for menu planning such as incorporating healthier foods like local greens into family meals, reducing the amount of red and processed meats and salt and avoiding sugary drinks. Using trusted channels of communications, such as peer educators, to provide nutrition education is also effective.<sup>9</sup>
- *Provide healthy food choices at work:* Women may have difficulty accessing affordable nutritious food during their working day. Employers can improve women's access to healthy food and drinks by providing healthy food options in the canteen, subsidising the cost of meals, providing safe drinking water, creating dedicated lunch breaks and providing a clean, pleasant space for workers to enjoy meals.

- *Support women to be physically active:* Regular physical activity provides a protective effect for breast cancer. Studies suggest a 25-40% average risk reduction is possible amongst physically active women as compared to the least active women.<sup>10</sup> Sedentary work or work with low physical job demands can pose a barrier to women reaching the recommendation of being physically active for at least 30 minutes every day.<sup>11</sup> Employers can organise regular events for promoting individual and group exercises and sport activities, provide exercise facilities inside workplaces and in close-by accessible areas, and implement policies that allow for routine time-slots during working hours for physical activity.



## CASE STUDY

### **San Pedro Diseños, S.A.<sup>12</sup> Guatemala City, Guatemala**

San Pedro Diseños is a textile company in Guatemala City. Approximately 60% of their employees are female and most are low wage earners with low levels of education.

By undertaking a health surveillance survey of its employees, managers found high levels of poor nutrition and lack of knowledge of nutrition among workers, and observed that the majority of their employees started their day without breakfast and many didn't have a nutritious lunch.

In response, management started a nutritional plan as part of an enterprise policy comprising three main strategies: food security, social services (making sure workers can afford the food) and health (general check-ups). Central to the strategy is a new meal programme which includes: cooking facilities; a clean dining area; subsidised meals; an hour long meal break; convenient access to clean water; and a healthy varied menu prepared by catering staff.

Fresh products are used each day, such as vegetables, meats and fruits. According to the managers, since the creation of the meal program workers are more productive and more satisfied; morale is higher; absenteeism and the need for rotation due to illness have fallen; and medical costs are down.



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# ENCOURAGE

## take up of cervical screening

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Employers in low-resource settings can play a big role in reducing the number of women dying from cervical cancer. This is because cervical cancer is largely preventable and there are effective solutions to detect it early through screening and treating 'pre-cancerous' lesions.<sup>14</sup>

Workplace cancer initiatives can integrate information about cervical cancer and the benefits of detecting it early into health education efforts, and encourage utilisation of simple and cost-effective screening tests. Because of the low cost, including cervical cancer screening and treatment as an employee benefit should be considered.

### **How can employers support their workers to access cervical screening services?**

The World Health Organization has endorsed the use of the "Screen-and-Treat" approach for low resource settings. National programmes for cervical screening using this approach, also known as visual inspection with acetic acid or VIA, now exists in many countries worldwide. Knowing if these services are available and partnering with a local organisation or health authority is the first step to supporting employees to access cervical screening.

### **Identifying cervical cancer screening services**

- Ministries of Health or national cancer societies, many of whom are UICC members, are good points of contact to find out if organised cervical screening services are available in a country or region. To search UICC's global database of member organisations, go to: [www.uicc.org](http://www.uicc.org)
- Members of the governing council of the global coalition 'Cervical Cancer Action' are also a good source of information about cervical screening and available local services ([www.cervicalcanceraction.org](http://www.cervicalcanceraction.org))

For employers who support access to cervical screening services, the internal communication or human resource manager should work with their local health authority to provide female workers with related information on available services, the appropriate age for screening and the health benefits for detecting cancer early. Information can also be shared through trained peer health educators.

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*The World Health Organization recommends that all women should be screened for cervical cancer at least once between the ages of 30 and 49.*

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## CASE STUDY

### Grounds for Health and Exportadora Atlantica – Preventing cervical cancer through workplace screen-and-treat programs

Exportadora Atlantica, an affiliate of ECOM in Nicaragua, and Grounds for Health an NGO dedicated to cervical cancer prevention in low- and middle-income countries are working together to reduce deaths from cervical cancer, the number one cause of cancer death among women in Nicaragua.

Exportadora Atlantica S.A. has come to recognize cervical cancer screening and treatment as an important benefit for female workers who make up 49% of the labour force at their coffee processing plant in Sebaco. In the processing plant, women play an indispensable role in the sorting, drying, and packing coffee. Many of these women are from underserved indigenous communities and are among those most at risk for developing cervical cancer due to socio-economic barriers. According to Exportadora Atlantica, this critical labor force has been reduced in recent years due to illness, aging and other issues. As a result Exportadora Atlantica has prioritized women's health as part of their social responsibility framework.

Grounds for Health and Exportadora Atlantica have worked in partnership to organize annual "Screen-and Treat" campaigns for women associated

with Exportadora's workforce. Grounds for Health coordinates with local health authorities to secure consult rooms, medical personnel, and the supplies and equipment needed for services.

Grounds for Health also works with Exportadora's dedicated human resource staff to identify women in the target group (30-49 years and more than three years since their last screening). Exportadora Atlantica coordinates transport for the women to the campaign site, assists with set-up and registration, and helps ensure any necessary follow-up for women who may need it.

Although basic healthcare is available free of charge in Nicaragua, attention to women's health offers business advantages relative to recruitment and retention. Female workers refer to the coffee exporter as an ally that encourages them to seek healthcare and take advantage of available benefits, in contrast to many other employers in the area.

Luis Castillo who leads Exportadora Atlantica's Occupational Health and Safety division, summarized the value of these services, "There's no doubt that the sum product of these efforts is the great satisfaction of having provided an immediate solution in the early detection and treatment of cervical cancer, to reduce the incidence of this disease".



*"Partnering with businesses to conduct screen-and-treat campaigns for their workers, their families and community members has proven to be a highly effective, low-cost approach to reaching women at risk. This partnership approach benefits businesses and their communities by ensuring women remain cancer free."*

**Kayla Moore, Senior Program Officer, Grounds for Health**

# PROMOTE

## awareness of the signs & symptoms of breast cancer

Workplaces in low-resource settings can have the greatest impact on reducing the burden of breast cancer by promoting breast awareness, recognition of signs and symptoms of breast cancer and the importance of seeking timely medical advice<sup>13</sup> This is because breast cancer can be treated best if treated early, and the majority of women who receive quality care for early breast cancer will recover to live healthy and productive lives.

The guide 'Tackling breast cancer in the workplace – a win for everyone', shows businesses how to use their established communication channels to educate women on the benefits of early detection and provides guidance on how to design a programme that builds breast awareness while delivering a return on investment.



*“Raising awareness and increasing access to early detection through the workplace presents an enormous opportunity to address the grave lack of action around breast cancer in many low-income settings – it is time that we all do more.”*

**Dr Beatrice Wiafe Addai, President;  
Breast Care International and Peace and  
Love Hospital, Ghana**



### CASE STUDY

#### BSR

#### Breast Cancer Awareness Raising in Vietnam

The HERhealth workplace programme, run by BSR, is an education programme for women working in low-skilled, export-oriented sectors, reaching over 300,000 women in over 250 factories and farms in Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, and Vietnam.

The programme strives to improve awareness and behaviour related to general and reproductive health, to challenge harmful taboos, to promote preventative care, and to increase access to critical health products and services.

In Vietnam, breast cancer awareness was highlighted as one of the issues to be addressed by the programme. The mortality rate for cancer is 73.5%, much higher than the world average of 59.7%, and higher than the average for developing countries (67.8%). The programme found that only 40% to 50% of women workers in factories have heard of breast cancer, highlighting the importance of raising awareness.

In each factory and farm, a group of women was selected as peer health educators, and were provided with a series of training sessions that take place at work. The peer educators were then responsible for organising sessions for their peers. A baseline and an endline survey were conducted among workers and factory management to measure the impact of the programme in terms of knowledge and behaviour change.

From 40-50% of women that had heard about breast cancer at the start of the programme, after programme implementation, close to 100% were aware of breast cancer.



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## SUPPORT

### a successful transition back to work

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With the right support, women can return to work after cancer treatment and continue to be productive members of their workforce. Bupa and UICC have produced the guide [‘Working with Cancer’](#) to help employers understand and respond to the needs of employees coming back to work after a cancer diagnosis.

The guide focuses on key actions that all businesses can take to support employees to transition back to the workplace such as supporting a flexible return to work through changes in tasks and hours, and enforcing workplace policies that ensure employees coping with cancer and their caregivers are not disadvantaged. The guide also provides links to best practice tools and resources from around the world to help businesses build an initiative that meets the needs of their workforce.



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# PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

## to implement & evaluate a successful workplace cancer initiative

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### Invest in peer-to-peer education

Employers can learn from the successes of women's health promotion programmes in low-resource settings where Peer Health Educators (PHEs) have successfully delivered health education to their co-workers.<sup>4, 15</sup> In programmes targeted at factory workers in China, PHEs received about 24 hours of health training based on the specific health needs of each workplace as well as skill training in communication and leadership. PHEs were then tasked with sharing their knowledge with their peers in the factory.

### Reach out to families & communities

In some cultural settings, gaining support of male family members as well as influential members of the community is important for promoting access to services.<sup>16</sup> Employers need to be aware that family relationships can influence participation in early detection and take steps to engage families and communities in the importance of preventing cancer and detecting it early. Educating male employees to take the messages home to their wives can benefit their families, amplify the impact, and contribute to a positive community climate of support.

### Address stigma

Employers need to be conscious of possible cultural sensitivities around discussing cancer in the workplace and its impact on participation in workplace health programmes.

Cancer could be a sensitive topic due to culture, beliefs and practices meaning that women may feel embarrassed and fearful to talk about cancer with their managers. Using a trusted channel of communication such as PHEs to improve cancer awareness may help to counter misinformation and promote greater participation.

### Overcome practical barriers to participation

Being aware and responding to the barriers to women's access to cancer prevention and screening services from local organisations and community health clinics is important.

- **Address issues of access.** Inconvenient access to services and work schedules often prohibit women from taking advantage of community-based programmes that may provide preventative care and early detection. Employers can help to overcome major barriers to access by providing logistical support such as transportation to health care facilities and assistance with scheduling appointments. Employers can consider a number of policy options to assist access such as providing paid time off from work to participate in cervical screening programmes during work hours.
- **Reduce out-of-pocket expenses.** Reducing the cost of screening increases demand for and use of services. Employers can reduce the costs of cervical screening by paying for the screening tests or their administrative costs if applicable.

### Improve workplace communication channels

- **Make all employees aware of workplace policies.** Employers can invest in effective processes and practices that lead to open, two-way communication with workers. Employees need to know about workplace policies and campaigns around cancer, and they should have opportunities to make suggestions of ways they can be improved.

- **Make sure your communications are reaching all employees.** Internal communication strategies need to make sure that health information is reaching all workers by using multiple channels, for example, through new staff orientation in addition to internal newsletters, educational brochures posters, and peer educators.

## Explore mechanisms to resource the programme

Small and medium enterprises in low-resource settings can look to support these initiatives through funding and technical assistance from local public health agencies that may provide small grants to help employers to start and sustain workplace health programmes. Additionally, where a small business is part of a supply chain, there may be opportunities to approach larger companies which have successfully implemented workplace programmes to provide financial and technical assistance. This approach has been used successfully with multinationals working to help small and medium enterprises in their supply chain to tackle health challenges such as HIV/AIDS through workplace programmes.<sup>17</sup>

## Continue to engage stakeholders

Employers should seek to involve female employees at all levels of decision-making around the design and implementation of a workplace cancer initiative to maximise engagement. When it becomes time to evaluate the programme, employers can benefit from getting a participant's perspective on:

- What they liked and disliked about the programme
- How they feel the programme could be improved
- How they have benefited from participating in the programme



*“It is so important for employers to encourage women workers to lead healthy lifestyles and seek early detection. Women are often the caregivers and breadwinners so keeping women healthy will affect everyone – when women die from a preventable disease like cervical cancer, the fabric of the whole family and their community is weakened.”*

**Dr. Miriam Cremer, President and Founder Basic Health International**

## Monitor health and business outcomes

It's important to establish a process for monitoring and evaluating an employee programme from the start. The best approach is to measure both 'outputs' and 'outcomes' of a programme.<sup>18</sup> **Outputs** are the activities or processes taken to implement a programme. Measuring outputs lets you keep implementation of the programme on track. For example, monitoring the cost of operating a programme. These measures can also give insight into why a programme may not have worked as well as expected, or why some parts were more successful than others. **Outcomes** are measures of the effectiveness of a programme. For example, the changes in employee participation. Ongoing measurements can be taken every 6 to 12 months. These evaluations should feed into the continual improvement of the programme and its delivery.



### **Taskforce on Women and Non-communicable Diseases**

Women, HIV, and Non-Communicable Diseases:  
Making the Links and Moving to Action  
[www.womenandncds.org](http://www.womenandncds.org)

Strengthening the health system to address  
NCDs in women  
[www.womenandncds.org](http://www.womenandncds.org)

### **Population Council, The Evidence Project**

Health Facility Guidelines and Management Benchmarks  
[www.herproject.org](http://www.herproject.org)

### **WHO and the International Labour Organization (ILO)**

Breastfeeding and Work: Let's make it work!  
What can employers do?  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

### **Alive & Thrive**

Creating breastfeeding friendly workplaces.  
The Workplace lactation support program toolkit provides  
information for institutions, companies, and other  
organizations interested in implementing policies and  
interventions to support lactation in the workplace.  
[www.healthynewbornnetwork.org](http://www.healthynewbornnetwork.org)

### **BSR**

HERhealth Curriculum, Eating Healthy  
The Eating Healthy curriculum resources help women  
understand the importance of eating a healthy and  
balanced diet.  
[www.herproject.org](http://www.herproject.org)

### **World Cancer Research Fund International**

Our Cancer Prevention Recommendations  
[www.wcrf.org](http://www.wcrf.org)

### **American Cancer Society**

Workplace Solutions, Nutrition and physical  
activity planner  
[www.acsworkplacesolutions.com](http://www.acsworkplacesolutions.com)

### **Let's Go! Workplace – A Resource for Businesses**

Includes a toolkit to help implement strategies which  
promote physical activity and healthy eating in the  
workplace and at home.  
[www.letsgo.org](http://www.letsgo.org)

### **Susan G. Komen**

- Multi-lingual breast awareness educational materials
- Workplace Awareness Programs Latin America  
[ww5.komen.org](http://ww5.komen.org)

### **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

The Right To Know Campaign: Protect Yourself  
from Breast Cancer  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### **Cancer Research UK**

Breast Cancer Leaflet  
[publications.cancerresearchuk.org](http://publications.cancerresearchuk.org)

### **UICC**

Knowledge summaries of comprehensive breast cancer  
control: Early Detection.  
[www.iccp-portal.org](http://www.iccp-portal.org)

### **Cervical Cancer Action**

New Options for Cervical Cancer Screening and Treatment  
in Low-Resource Settings  
[www.cervicalcanceraction.org](http://www.cervicalcanceraction.org)

### **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

Workplace Health Promotion site provides a detailed  
description of planning for monitoring and evaluation for  
workplace health promotion  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### **BSR**

HERproject Partner toolkit is designed to employers  
to understand and measure return on investment for  
health programs in factories.  
[www.herproject.org](http://www.herproject.org)

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