National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)

Breast Cancer and Aboriginal Women

There is a lack of Aboriginal-specific information, especially Métis-specific information, related to breast cancer and Aboriginal women in Canada. As a result, it is difficult to measure the prevalence and severity of the disease among the female Aboriginal population in Canada.

Here is what we do know:

- Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among Canadian women.
- The incidence rate of breast cancer among Aboriginal people is on the rise.
- Aboriginal people are more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage of the disease than non-Aboriginal people.[1] (This is possibly due to the fact that Aboriginal people have limited access to breast cancer screening and treatment services.)
- Among the First Nations population in Ontario, incidence rates for some preventable cancers—including breast, lung, prostate and colorectal cancer—have been increasing.[2]
- Although breast cancer incidence rates and breast cancer mortality rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native women are low, these rates have been increasing over the past few years.[3] There is currently insufficient data to indicate why incidence rates are on the rise among these populations.
- The survival rate for breast cancer is significantly worse for First Nations women in Ontario compared to the non-Aboriginal population. In Saskatchewan, the survival rate for breast cancer is lower for northern First Nations than for southern non-First Nations populations.[4]
- One study completed in five First Nations communities in New Brunswick found that only 29 per cent of the women were aware of the provincial self-referral program (most believed they had to be referred by their family physician).[5]
- Presently, the incidence rate of breast cancer among Inuit women over 50 is very low, however, this rate is on the rise and is approaching the Canadian average.[6]

(Footnotes)

[1] http://www.meet-ics.com/cancercontrol/pdf/AboriginalPeople.pdf

[2] First Nations Cancer Research and Surveillance Priorities in Canada. http://www.cancercare.on.ca/documents/ACSFirstNationsWorkshopReport.pdf

[3] An Epidemiological Analysis of Breast Cancer Screening Among American Indian and Alaska Native Women: Results from the 2003 California Health Interview Survey

[4] First Nations Cancer Research and Surveillance Priorities in Canada. http://www.cancercare.on.ca/documents/ACSFirstNationsWorkshopReport.pdf

[5] Breast Cancer Screening. First Nations Communities in New Brunswick