

By Cathy Dillon

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Heart disease is the number one killer of Nebraska women, yet so many of us worry about cancer. Breast cancer in particular.

Fortunately for Nebraska women and those who love them most, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' Every Woman Matters (EWM) Program offers screening and education for the early detection and prevention of breast cancer and heart disease.

So how does WISEWOMAN fit in?

Thanks to federal funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, eligible Nebraska women between 40 and 64 can benefit from WISEWOMAN (Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation) services as a fully integrated part of the EWM program.

"Without this program, I would probably go most of my life without the medical attention I need," said a program participant.

The EWM Program has reached more than 70,000 women since it began screening for breast and cervical cancer in 1991.

As one of the first 12 programs to receive WISEWOMAN funding in 2001, Nebraska has since helped over 19,000 women receive screening and education to help reduce their risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes under the WISEWOMAN Program.

Risk factors include elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, diabetes and tobacco use. Education is aimed at increasing physical activity, improving nutrition and tobacco cessation.

“I lowered my cholesterol from 250 to 215, went down two dress sizes in clothing, and my blood pressure was so much better. All of this means so much to me,” said another program participant.

It’s important that Nebraska women have an opportunity to live a healthy life, but some may not have access to screening services and education.

WISEWOMAN closes that gap for many women who wouldn’t otherwise be able to make health a priority. Services are aimed at low-income, uninsured or underinsured women ages 40 to 64. Special efforts are made to reach populations of women at higher risk for cardiovascular disease—African American, Hispanic and Native American.

Helping women live healthier lives means more than just putting their minds at ease when it comes to breast or cervical cancer. With the WISEWOMAN Program, it can mean putting their hearts at ease too.

For more information visit www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth/ewm.