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Saint Francis Hospital Receives Grant from CT Breast Health Initiative to Support Community Outreach

HARTFORD, Conn. (March 23, 2022) – Saint Francis Hospital, a member of Trinity Health Of New England, has been awarded \$22,800 from Connecticut Breast Health Initiative to support its efforts to reduce late-stage breast cancer diagnoses and improve survival rates among underserved women in our community.

The intended beneficiaries of this grant are predominantly Black and Latina, 100 percent low-income or poverty level, and either uninsured or underinsured women in our service area.

“We greatly appreciate Connecticut Breast Health Initiative’s continued support and partnership,” said Dr. Kristen Zarfos, Medical Director of the hospital’s Karl J. Krapek, Sr. Comprehensive Women’s Health Center. “The need for our Breast Health Outreach Program is even greater now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted preventive care and exacerbated already striking health disparities.”

Among Black and Latina women in Connecticut, breast cancer is the second leading cause of premature death overall, behind cardiovascular disease. In fact, Black women have the highest breast cancer mortality rate in Connecticut, despite having a lower incidence rate than non-Hispanic White women. Decades of Connecticut Department of Public Health data have shown that Hartford area low-income/poverty level women (predominantly Black and Latina) die prematurely from breast cancer at disproportionate rates when compared to Connecticut women from higher income levels. Often, a late-stage diagnosis of breast cancer in low-income Black and Latina women contributes to this disparity.

Nationally, almost half of newly diagnosed breast cancers in Black women have already spread beyond the breast, compared to about a third of breast cancers diagnosed in White women. Breast cancer deaths in Black women are about 40 percent higher than in White women, according to the American Cancer Society.

According to a 2021 study published in the American Medical Association’s *JAMA Open Network*, women of color were more likely than White women to miss breast cancer screenings during the pandemic. The study’s authors called for healthcare providers to “double down” on their efforts to reach underserved populations.

Saint Francis Hospital's Connecticut Breast Health Initiative grant is helping to fund a full-time Breast Health Center community health worker to do just that. Through her efforts, the Saint Francis Breast Health Outreach Program plans to engage more than 300 underserved women a year in breast care. In the past, the program has held outreach and educational events in convenient community settings in low-income neighborhoods in Hartford. Now, with the latest COVID-19 surge subsiding, the program's community health worker is beginning to conduct in-person outreach once again.

"The CT Breast Health Initiative's decision to again support the reduction of late-stage breast cancer diagnoses among underserved or uninsured women, therefore improving survival rates, through this grant to Saint Francis is of utmost importance," said CT BHI President Joyce G. Bray. "This will impact positively the health of women in our state and aligns perfectly with our mission."

Trinity Health Of New England Regional Vice President of Philanthropy and Saint Francis Foundation Chief Development Officer Timothy R. Stanton expressed the hospital's deep gratitude for CT BHI's support.

"Our partnership with CT BHI allows us to engage more underserved women in potentially life-saving screenings and preventive services, which are essential to closing gaps in health outcomes and advancing health equity," Stanton said.

About Saint Francis Hospital

Saint Francis Hospital has been an anchor institution in Connecticut since 1897. Saint Francis is a member of Trinity Health Of New England and Trinity Health, one of the largest multi-institutional Catholic health care delivery systems in the nation. Saint Francis Hospital, a Level 1 Trauma Center, is a 617-bed hospital, a major teaching hospital, and the largest Catholic hospital in New England. Other Saint Francis entities include the Comprehensive Women's Health Center, the Connecticut Joint Replacement Institute, the Hoffman Heart and Vascular Institute of Connecticut, the Smilow Cancer Hospital Yale-New Haven at Saint Francis, Trinity Health Of New England Medical Group, and Community Health and Well Being, which includes the Curtis D. Robinson Center for Health Equity, the Joan C. Dauber Food Pantry, and the Greater Hartford Family Advocacy Center. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @SaintFrancisCT

About Connecticut Breast Health Initiative

The Connecticut Breast Health Initiative, Inc. is a statewide non-profit volunteer organization making a significant impact locally in the fight against breast cancer through education and research since 2004. It is unique in that all monies raised in Connecticut stay in Connecticut and the focus is on research.

To date, \$4.2 million have been awarded through 105 grants to breast cancer researchers in Connecticut.

Each year, CT BHI strives to surpass this milestone with the support of its donors, sponsors, and other fundraising efforts, including its annual Race in the Park. The Race in the Park returns this spring after a two-year pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be held Saturday, May 7th in New Britain's historic Walnut Hill Park.