



Public Advocate for the City of New York

Missing the Mark: HHC Mammogram Wait Time Off Target

**A REPORT BY PUBLIC ADVOCATE BETSY GOTBAUM
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer affecting American women and is the second leading cause of cancer-related death among women. Between 1999 and 2003, more than 5,000 New York City women were diagnosed with breast cancer annually and more than 1,200 women died each year from the disease. Women who live in Manhattan or Staten Island have the highest annual breast cancer rates, as well as the highest mortality rates.

The American Cancer Society and physicians agree that annual mammogram screenings for women aged 40 and older are the most effective method of detecting breast cancer in its early stages, when treatment is most likely to be successful. An average of 55,354 New York City women will turn 40 every year for the next 20 years. It is estimated that 23 percent of New York City women age 40 or over have not obtained a recent mammogram. If this trend continues, each year there will be an additional 12,731 women in New York City in need of a mammogram who will not obtain one.

For low-income, uninsured women, the cost of obtaining a mammogram can be prohibitive. The free and low-cost screenings offered by the City's Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) are thus an invaluable resource for many women in New York City. Yet some women may find accessing this potentially life-saving service difficult. While Mayor Bloomberg has set seven days as the target maximum wait time for obtaining a mammography screening appointment at HHC facilities, women who seek a screening are likely to face a much longer wait, a problem the City attributes to mammogram technician vacancies and machine downtime. The failure of the City to provide accurate and complete information about where women can receive a mammogram creates an additional barrier to care.

The Office of the Public Advocate initiated an investigation to: 1) assess the quality of the information provided by City agencies on how to obtain a free or low-cost mammogram at HHC facilities and 2) determine what the average wait time is for a routine mammogram appointment. This report finds that access to free or low-cost mammograms at HHC facilities is delayed by bureaucratic obstacles and that the wait times for mammogram screenings at most HHC facilities do not meet the Mayor's established goal.

Methodology

To obtain the HHC locations that offer free or low-cost mammograms, a researcher contacted 311 and asked for HHC locations in each borough that provide this service. The Public Advocate's Office made multiple calls to the list of HHC facilities provided by 311 and asked staff at the clinics for the date of the first available appointment for a routine mammogram. The waiting time to obtain an appointment was determined by counting the number of days between the date of the telephone call and the date of the appointment offered by clinic staff. The wait times from the multiple calls to each HHC facility were averaged to determine the average wait at that HHC facility.

Findings

- **The 24-day average wait time for a mammogram appointment at HHC facilities is more than three times longer than the City’s target of seven days.**
- **According to the City’s data, wait times for a mammogram appointment at HHC facilities are increasing.**
- **There are no HHC facilities on Staten Island that perform mammograms.**
- **New Yorkers seeking information about free or low-cost mammograms from the City receive incomplete and inaccurate information.**
- **Five of the 15 HHC facilities that perform mammograms do not offer extended hours for mammogram appointments.**

Recommendations

Reduce mammogram wait times by hiring more mammogram technicians

The HHC employment webpage should always list this position to help minimize staff shortages.

Reduce mammogram wait times by reducing mammogram machine downtime

HHC should review its maintenance and repair schedule to confirm that machine work is not scheduled during appointment hours to avoid a reduction in available mammogram appointment slots. In addition, HHC should ensure that it purchases new mammogram machines on a timely basis to replace consistently problematic machines.

Offer mammograms to Staten Island residents either through a stationary facility or a mobile mammography van

HHC should offer free and/or low-cost mammograms to Staten Island residents to increase the screening rate among low-income women on Staten Island and reduce related mortality rates among this population of women.

Offer mammogram appointments outside of regular business hours

HHC should offer mammogram appointments outside of regular business hours at the HHC facilities that do not currently do so to provide more flexible scheduling for women.

Provide accurate mammogram information through 311

HHC should work with the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT), which operates 311, to ensure that 311 operators provide the correct facilities and telephone numbers to callers seeking information about mammograms.

Ensure that the appropriate HHC staff is aware of what free and/or low-cost mammogram services are offered and is familiar with the Healthy Women’s Partnership (HWP) program

All appropriate staff at HHC facilities offering mammograms should be aware of whether the facility provides free and/or low-cost mammograms and should offer full information about those services to individuals who inquire. In addition, staff should be knowledgeable about Healthy Women’s Partnership (HWP), a New York State Department of Health breast cancer program that offers free mammograms to women who are aged 40 and older, are underinsured or uninsured, and meet income eligibility requirements, and should refer individuals to the local HWP office to enroll in the program if it is necessary to do so in order to obtain a free mammogram.

Update the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and HHC websites to include information on where to obtain a free or low-cost mammogram at HHC facilities and improve voicemail messages for telephone lines that receive calls regarding mammograms

The DOHMH and HHC websites should list all of the HHC facilities that offer free or low-cost mammograms. In addition, voicemail messages should provide information in languages other than English and should allow individuals to leave a voicemail message regarding scheduling a mammogram appointment.

INTRODUCTION

The American Cancer Society and physicians agree that annual screening mammograms¹ are the most effective method of detecting breast cancer in its early stages when treatment is most likely to be successful.² Research has shown that routine mammography can reduce the risk of breast cancer mortality by more than 30 percent.³ For many low-income, uninsured women, however, the cost of obtaining a mammogram can be prohibitive. The free and low-cost screenings offered by the City's Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) are thus an invaluable resource for many low-income, uninsured, and underinsured women in New York City. Yet some women may find accessing this potentially life-saving service difficult. While Mayor Bloomberg has set seven days as the target maximum wait time for obtaining a mammography screening appointment at HHC facilities,⁴ women who seek a screening are likely to face a much longer wait. The failure of the City to provide accurate and complete information about where women can receive a mammogram creates an additional barrier to care.

Pursuant to the New York City Charter, the Public Advocate is authorized to review and investigate the programs, operations, and activities of City agencies.⁵ In accordance with this responsibility, the Office of the Public Advocate initiated an investigation to: 1) assess the quality of the information provided by City agencies on how to obtain a free or low-cost mammogram at HHC facilities and 2) determine what the average wait time is for a routine mammogram appointment.⁶ This report finds that access to free or low-cost mammograms at HHC facilities is delayed by bureaucratic obstacles and that the wait times for mammogram screenings at most HHC facilities do not meet the Mayor's established goal.

BACKGROUND

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer affecting American women and is the second leading cause of cancer-related death among women.⁷ See the table below for annual incidence and mortality cases and rates for New York City.

¹ An annual "screening mammogram" is a mammogram for asymptomatic women. A "diagnostic mammogram" is used to check for breast cancer after a lump or other symptoms of breast cancer have been found. National Cancer Institute, "Screening Mammograms: Questions and Answers," www.nci.nih.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Detection/screening-mammograms, May 23, 2006; Internet; accessed 25 August 2006.

² American Cancer Society, *Can Breast Cancer Be Found Early?* www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_3X_Can_breast_cancer_be_found_early_5.asp?rnav=cri, September 2, 2005; Internet; accessed 14 July 2006.

³ New York State Department of Health, *Mammography*, www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/cancer/center/mammography.htm, August 2003; Internet, accessed 4 April 2006.

⁴ The target of seven days was first set in 2002. The City of New York, *The Mayor's Management Report*, Fiscal 2002.

⁵ See NYC Charter Section 24.

⁶ In 2003, the City Council released a report examining mammogram wait times at the City's public and private hospitals. Keisha Wooten, The Council of The City of New York, *An Updated Report on Mammogram Wait Times in New York City*, May 2003.

⁷ The most commonly diagnosed cancer for women is skin cancer. Lung cancer claims more women's lives. Centers for Disease Control, *National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program*, www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/index.htm, July 13, 2006; Internet; accessed 25 July 2006.

Breast Cancer Incidence and Mortality by Borough (1999-2003)⁸

Location	Incidence		Mortality	
	Average Annual Cases	Annual Rate per 100,000 Women	Average Annual Deaths	Annual Rate per 100,000 Women
New York City	5,036.8	141.1	1,204.2	26.4
Bronx	716.8	107.1	183.0	27.0
Brooklyn	1,451.8	108.5	374.0	27.2
Manhattan	1,168.2	132.7	249.0	26.8
Queens	1,383.6	108.5	322.2	24.2
Staten Island	316.4	127.1	76.0	30.0

Of women in New York City, those who live in Manhattan or Staten Island have the highest annual breast cancer incidence rates, 132.7 and 127.1 per 100,000 women, respectively, as well as the highest mortality rates per 100,000 women, 26.8 and 30.0, respectively. According to a 2004 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Community Health survey, of all New York City women who reported incomes between 100% to 199% of the poverty level, residents of Staten Island had the lowest screening rates. Of women who reported incomes between 200% and 599% of the poverty level, Manhattan women had the lowest screening rates.⁹

According to a 2004 DOHMH Community Health Survey, 23 percent of New York City women age 40 and older have not had a mammogram within the last two years.¹⁰ Of these women who have not had a recent mammogram, 32 percent were Asian American, 24 percent were Caucasian, 21 percent were African American, 20 percent were Hispanic, and 21 percent were identified as Other.¹¹

Because women age 40 and older are especially at risk for breast cancer, the American Cancer Society recommends that healthy women age 40 and older obtain annual mammograms.¹² Although mammograms have some limitations, most physicians and the American Cancer Society agree that mammograms are the most effective method of detecting breast cancer.¹³ Mammograms can detect breast cancer in the earliest, most curable stages, usually one to three years before a lump can be felt.¹⁴ An October 2005 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* revealed that the breast cancer death rate had dropped by 24 percent since 1990, a decline attributed to annual mammogram screenings for women age 40 and older.¹⁵

Although both the American Cancer Society and physicians recommend annual mammograms, a recent Harvard study of 145,000 women age 65 or older revealed that only 61 percent of these

⁸ New York State Department of Health, New York State Cancer Registry, www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/cancer/registry/vol1n.htm, April 2006; Internet; accessed 13 July 2006.

⁹ Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), EpiQuery, 2004 Community Health Survey.

¹⁰ DOHMH, EpiQuery, 2004 Community Health Survey.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *See 2.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Mayo Clinic, "Mammography: X-ray exam to detect breast cancer," www.mayoclinic.com/health/mammogram/WO00023, November 20, 2005, Internet; accessed 25 July 2006.

¹⁵ Deborah Franklin, "Are Mammograms Right for Everyone?," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2005.

women received a mammogram at least once every two years.¹⁶ Among the reasons cited for not obtaining an annual mammogram were a lack of insurance,¹⁷ language and cultural barriers¹⁸ and lack of awareness of breast cancer risk.¹⁹

Once a woman decides to obtain a mammogram, she may face a long wait for a screening. Since 2004, HHC has attributed long wait times in part to technician vacancies.²⁰ The number of mammogram technicians, a type of radiologic technologist, is decreasing.²¹ It is estimated that the supply of mammogram technicians nationally will decrease by 22 percent by 2025.²² The shortage of radiologic technologists who specialize in mammography is partially attributed to low pay.²³ Compared to other radiologic technologists, on an average wage per hour basis, mammogram technicians earned significantly less than technicians working in nuclear medicine (26 percent), MRI (12 percent), and sonography (10 percent).²⁴

Since 2004, HHC has also attributed long mammogram wait times in part to mammogram machine downtime.²⁵ Machine downtime²⁶ refers to periods in which a machine is removed from operation in order to conduct preventive and routine maintenance or repairs needed because a mammogram machine is not meeting the quality assurance standards of the Mammography Quality Standards Act,²⁷ which is regulated by the United States Food and Drug Administration's Center for Devices and Radiological Health.

Additionally, inadequate reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid makes mammography a costly service for hospitals to provide to low-income patients. A mammogram at an HHC facility costs as much as \$600.²⁸ However, the current Medicaid reimbursement rate for a mammogram is \$90, while Medicare currently pays between \$101 and \$105 per procedure.²⁹ A representative from Harlem Hospital Center, an HHC facility, stated that one reason for the long mammogram wait time was the low reimbursement rate.³⁰

¹⁶ Eric Nagourney, "Screening: Older Women May Be Skipping Mammograms," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2006.

¹⁷ "Mammograms Harder to Get, Report Finds," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2004.

¹⁸ The Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, *Hispanics/Latinas: Developing Effective Cancer Education Print Materials*, and *African Americans: Developing Effective Cancer Education Print Materials*, and *Asian and Pacific Islanders: Developing Effective Cancer Education Print Materials*, 2005.

¹⁹ Denise Grady, "Young Black Women Prone to Deadly Cancer," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2006.

²⁰ The City of New York, *The Mayor's Management Reports*, Fiscal 2004, Fiscal 2005 and Fiscal 2006 Preliminary.

²¹ Sharyl Nass and John Ball, Editors, *Improving Breast Imaging Quality Standards*, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.: 2005.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The City of New York, *The Mayor's Management Reports*, Fiscal 2004, Fiscal 2005 and Fiscal 2006 Preliminary.

²⁶ E-mail from Bradley Hutton, Director of Cancer Services Program, New York State Department of Health, dated August 22, 2006.

²⁷ 42 U.S.C. 263b. The Mammography Quality Standards Act was enacted by Congress in 1992 and reauthorized in 1996 and 2004.

²⁸ Telephone call to Department of Radiology, Queens Hospital, on August 23, 2006.

²⁹ E-mail from Bradley Hutton, Director of Cancer Services Program, New York State Department of Health, dated August 23, 2006.

³⁰ Telephone call to Harlem Hospital Center, July 18, 2006.

An average of 55,354 New York City women will turn 40 every year for the next 20 years.³¹ It is estimated that 23 percent of New York City women age 40 or over have not obtained a recent mammogram.³² If this trend continues, each year there will be an additional 12,731 women in New York City in need of a mammogram who will not obtain one. New York City women without health insurance are less likely to receive a mammogram than women with health insurance. Forty-nine percent of New York City women without health insurance receive a mammogram, compared to 79 percent of women with health insurance.³³

Access to Information about Free or Low-Cost Mammograms at HHC Facilities

In April 2006, the Office of the Public Advocate examined the New York City DOHMH website to find out what information was provided to New Yorkers seeking information about breast cancer, mammography, and where to obtain a free or low-cost mammogram. The website's *Health Topics A-Z* section offered information on everything from "anthrax" to "wasps," and included topics of less pressing health concern than mammography, such as "baby names" and "dog license," but "mammogram" was not among the more than 500 topics listed. Under the topic of "breast cancer," the webpage provided no information on where to obtain a free or low-cost mammogram other than to call 311 to ask for a cancer screening.

After a thorough search of the website, the Office did locate a 2005 "Guide to Social Services and Health Care in New York City," which provided a list of locations offering mammograms, but it was difficult to find on the website and did not have complete and accurate information. Many of the phone numbers listed in the guide were incorrect and some of the facilities listed did not perform mammograms. In addition, the guide did not list the mammogram sites' hours of operation or the eligibility requirements for obtaining a free or low-cost mammogram.

In May 2006, the Public Advocate brought this issue to the attention of DOHMH, and many of the above problems were soon corrected.³⁴ DOHMH now provides information about mammograms and breast cancer in the *Health Topics A-Z* and *Women's Health* sections of its website, as well as detailed contact information for offices affiliated with Healthy Women's Partnership (HWP),³⁵ a New York State Department of Health breast cancer program which is managed by the American Cancer Society. The DOHMH webpage³⁶ also states that HHC offers mammograms at six of its facilities at little or no cost and instructs readers to call 311 and ask for a mammogram.

³¹ 2000 U.S. Census, Pct12. Sex by Age [209] – Universe: Total population, <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet; accessed 25 July 2006.

³² DOHMH, *Mammograms and Breast Cancer Prevention*, www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cancer/cancerbreast.shtml; Internet; accessed 25 July 2006.

³³ DOHMH, *Women at Risk: The Health of Women in New York City*, March 2005.

³⁴ An examination of the DOHMH website in June revealed that the website had been updated. www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cancer/cancerbreast.shtml?b=11; Internet; accessed 19 June 2006.

³⁵ HWP provides free mammograms to women who are aged 40 and older, are underinsured or uninsured and meet income eligibility requirements. New York State Department of Health Cancer Service Program, *Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening (Healthy Women's Partnerships) Program Report 2003-2004*.

³⁶ www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cancer/cancerbreast.shtml?b=11.

A search on HHC's website³⁷ revealed one webpage on mammograms, which was entitled "Mother's Day Mammograms."³⁸ The webpage states that "New York City's public hospitals offer [a mammogram] at little or no cost all year long," and lists six facilities with new mammography centers, but no telephone numbers are provided.³⁹ Again, readers are instructed to call 311 and ask for a mammogram.⁴⁰

METHODOLOGY

To obtain the HHC locations that offer free or low-cost mammograms, a researcher contacted 311 and asked for HHC locations in each borough that provide this service. (See Appendix A for a list of the HHC facilities and telephone numbers provided by 311).

In July 2006, the Public Advocate's Office made multiple calls to the list of HHC facilities provided by 311 and asked staff at the clinics for the date of the first available appointment for an annual screening mammogram. The waiting time to obtain an appointment was determined by counting the number of days between the date of the telephone call and the date of the appointment offered by clinic staff. The wait times from the multiple calls to each HHC facility were averaged to determine the average wait at that HHC facility.

³⁷ www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/home/home.shtml; Internet; accessed 18 July 2006.

³⁸ www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/community/hhc-mammograms.shtml; Internet; accessed 18 July 2006.

³⁹ *Ibid.* The six facilities listed are Bellevue Hospital Center, Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center, Kings County Hospital Center, Jacobi Medical Center, Segundo Ruis Belvis and Morrisania Diagnostic and Treatment Centers.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

FINDINGS

The chart below indicates which HHC facilities provide free or low-cost mammograms and the average wait time for a mammogram appointment at each facility.

HHC Facility, by Borough	Free or Low-cost	Average Wait Time for a Mammogram Appointment
Bronx		
Segundo Ruiz Belvis	Low-cost.	1 day
Jacobi Medical Center	Free only during May. Otherwise, low-cost.	44 days
Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center	Free (restricted). ¹	26 days
Morrisania Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Low-cost. ²	49 days ²
North Central Bronx Hospital	Free only during May. Otherwise, low-cost. ³	18 days
Brooklyn		
Coney Island Hospital	Free. ⁴	11 days
Cumberland Diagnostic & Treatment Center ⁵	Low-cost.	5 days
East New York Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Low-cost. ³	58 days
Kings County Hospital Center	Free.	30 days
Woodhull Medical & Mental Health Center ⁵	Low-cost.	2 days
Manhattan		
Bellevue Hospital Center	Low-cost.	75 days
Gouverneur Healthcare Services	Free. ⁴	15 days
Harlem Hospital Center	Free.	2 days
Queens		
Elmhurst Hospital Center	Free.	4 days
Queens Hospital Center	Free only during May. Otherwise, low-cost.	14 days
Staten Island (no HHC mammogram facilities)⁶		

¹ Only the first visit is free. Any follow-up is covered, but if the result is negative, the next annual exam will not be free.

² The number provided by 311 to Morrisania Diagnostic and Treatment Center was to the general voicemail appointment line. No message could be left to request a mammogram appointment. However, after calling the radiology department using the Morrisania general inquiry number, information on mammograms and the next available appointment date was provided.

³ When asked if it was possible to obtain a low-cost mammogram, the person on the phone did not know if this option was available. Only after multiple transfers to different hospital staff was an answer obtained.

⁴ Hospital staff indicated that mammograms were free only if one registered with a HWP program located in the same borough as the HHC facility.

⁵ 311 provided the same telephone number for both facilities. Separate calls were made to ask for a mammogram at each facility.

⁶ The only HHC facility on Staten Island is Sea View Hospital Rehabilitation Center and Home, a nursing home.

The 24-day average wait time for a mammogram appointment at HHC facilities is more than three times longer than the City's target of seven days.

- This report finds that the average wait time for a mammogram appointment at an HHC facility is 24 days. The 2006 PMMR states seven days is the City's target wait time; 10 facilities (67%) failed to meet the target.
- Five facilities (33%) had a wait time of 30 days or more. At two HHC facilities, wait times were especially lengthy: 58 days at East New York Diagnostic and Treatment Center and 75 days at Bellevue Hospital Center.

According to the City's data, wait times for a mammogram appointment at HHC facilities are increasing.

- While the City reports a much shorter average wait time than that found by this Office's research, it does indicate that the wait time for mammogram appointments is increasing. According to the 2006 PMMR, the average wait time for a mammogram appointment at HHC facilities was three days in FY02⁴¹ and FY03, eight days in FY04, and 13 days in FY05.⁴² While the wait time for a mammogram in the first four months of FY06 was 11 days, a slight improvement compared to FY05, the wait time for a mammogram appointment continues to be longer than in previous years.

There are no HHC facilities that perform mammograms on Staten Island.

- Although the women of Staten Island have the second highest annual rate of breast cancer and the highest annual breast cancer mortality rate in New York City, there are no HHC facilities or HHC-funded mobile mammography vans⁴³ on Staten Island that perform mammograms.

Five of the 15 HHC facilities that perform mammograms do not offer extended hours for mammogram appointments.

- Mammogram appointments were not available before 9:00 AM or after 5:00 PM, or on weekends, at five HHC facilities.⁴⁴

New Yorkers seeking information about free or low-cost mammograms from the City receive incomplete and inaccurate information.

- Although the DOHMH website states that free or low-cost mammograms are available at six HHC facilities, while the HHC website indicates 11 facilities, the Public Advocate's Office identified through 311 15 HHC facilities that offer either free or low-cost mammograms. Six facilities offered free mammograms year-round, and three facilities offered free mammograms during the month of May and low-cost mammograms during the rest of the year. Six facilities offered low-cost mammograms all year. Furthermore, neither the DOHMH or HHC websites provide telephone numbers for the facilities offering free or low-cost mammograms; those interested are simply directed to call 311.
- 311 operators provided inaccurate telephone numbers for HHC mammogram facilities. Telephone numbers provided by 311 often were to incorrect departments, which led to multiple transfers before reaching the correct person or department to make a

⁴¹ The City of New York, *The Mayor's Management Report*, Fiscal 2002.

⁴² The City of New York, *The Mayor's Management Report*, Fiscal 2006 Preliminary.

⁴³ Per telephone call on August 21, 2006 with Mary Solomon, Executive Director of Women's Outreach, Women's Outreach Network, which operates a mobile mammography van that services Staten Island. The van is owned by the American-Italian Cancer Foundation.

⁴⁴ These facilities are Segundo Ruiz Belvis, North Central Bronx Hospital, Coney Island Hospital, Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center and Bellevue Hospital Center.

mammogram appointment. 311 operators provided the same telephone number for two separate HHC facilities, Cumberland Diagnostic and Treatment Center and Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center. Calls to 311 to verify the numbers previously provided sometimes resulted in conflicting information regarding whether or not a HHC site provided mammograms.

Access to free or low-cost mammograms is limited by the fact that some HHC staff members responding to telephone inquiries do not have complete information about the services available.

- Repeat calls to certain HHC facilities resulted in different descriptions of the mammogram services available at those facilities. At some facilities, staff members stated that they did not know if low-cost mammograms were available,⁴⁵ and at others, the availability of low-cost mammograms was not mentioned unless the researcher specifically inquired about low-cost options.⁴⁶ In addition, the eligibility requirements for low-costs mammograms were generally unknown to the staff answering the telephones.

HHC staff at five HHC facilities did not indicate that their facility offered free mammograms through HWP.

- Although 11 of the 15 HHC facilities partner with HWP to offer free mammograms, staff at five HHC facilities stated that low-cost mammograms were available and did not provide information about free mammograms offered in connection with HWP.^{47, 48}

Calls to the telephone numbers provided by 311 sometimes reached voicemail messages at HHC facilities that lacked relevant information and clear instructions regarding mammograms.

- Many voicemail messages were in English only and did not indicate that the caller had reached the women's health or radiology department.
- In some cases, alternative numbers to call were provided; however, callers were advised to call these alternative numbers only in the event of an emergency. No alternative numbers that callers could use to make a mammogram appointment were provided. Since scheduling a mammogram is not necessarily an emergency issue, not providing an

⁴⁵ Staff at North Central Bronx Hospital and East New York Diagnostic & Treatment Center did not know if a low-cost mammogram option was available.

⁴⁶ At the following four HHC facilities, a low-cost mammogram was only offered when the researcher inquired about this option: North Central Bronx Hospital, East New York Diagnostic & Treatment Center, Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center, and Morrisania Diagnostic & Treatment Center.

⁴⁷ The five facilities that did not mention HWP are: Jacobi Medical Center, North Central Bronx Hospital, Cumberland Diagnostic and Treatment Center, Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center, and Queens Hospital Center. The following four HHC facilities do not participate in HWP: Bellevue Hospital Center, East New York Diagnostic and Treatment Center, Segundo Ruiz Belvis, and Morrisania Diagnostic and Treatment Center.

⁴⁸ At Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center, although the staffperson mentioned that the first mammogram is free, she did not mention that future annual mammograms would be free with HWP.

alternative number to call for mammogram appointments could deter women from making appointments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reduce mammogram wait times by hiring more mammogram technicians

HHC must fill mammogram technician vacancies. Although the 2006 PMMR states that mammogram wait time is due to “technician vacancies experienced citywide,”⁴⁹ the HHC employment opportunities webpage⁵⁰ does not list any mammography radiologic technologist vacancies. If mammogram technician vacancies are a recurring problem, the HHC employment webpage should always list this position to help minimize staff shortages.

Reduce mammogram wait times by reducing mammogram machine downtime

HHC should review its maintenance and repair schedule to confirm that machine work is not scheduled during appointment hours to avoid a reduction in available mammogram appointment slots. In addition, HHC should ensure that it purchases new mammogram machines on a timely basis to replace consistently problematic machines.

Offer mammograms to Staten Island residents either through a stationary facility or a mobile mammography van

HHC should offer free and/or low-cost mammograms to Staten Island residents to increase the screening rate among low-income women on Staten Island and reduce related mortality rates among this population of women.

Offer mammogram appointments outside of regular business hours

HHC should offer extended mammogram appointment times at the HHC facilities that do not currently offer appointments before 9:00 AM, after 5:00 PM, or on weekends, to provide more flexible scheduling for women.

Provide accurate mammogram information through 311

HHC should work with the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT), which operates 311, to ensure that 311 operators provide the correct facilities and telephone numbers to callers seeking information about mammograms.

Ensure that the appropriate HHC staff is aware of what free and/or low-cost mammogram services are offered

All appropriate staff at HHC facilities offering mammograms should be aware of whether the facility provides free or low-cost mammograms and should offer full information about those services to individuals who inquire. In addition, staff should be knowledgeable about the eligibility requirements for the services offered.

⁴⁹ The City of New York, *The Mayor’s Management Report*, Fiscal 2006 Preliminary.

⁵⁰ www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/careers/employment.shtml

Ensure that the appropriate HHC staff is familiar with HWP

All appropriate staff at HHC facilities should be knowledgeable about HWP and should refer individuals to the local HWP office to enroll in the program if it will make them eligible for a free mammogram.

Update the DOHMH and HHC websites to include information on where to obtain a free and/or low-cost mammogram at HHC facilities

Although the DOHMH did amend its website in response to the initial findings by the Public Advocate, the webpage on breast cancer and mammograms should list all the HHC facilities that offer free or low-cost mammograms and their appropriate telephone numbers. The HHC should update its website to better reflect which facilities offer mammograms and include the appropriate contact information for these sites and not simply direct individuals to 311. The website should also provide a summary of which facilities offer free or low-cost mammograms and list the eligibility requirements.

Improve the voicemail messages for telephone lines that receive calls regarding mammograms

All voicemail messages should make reference to women's health, breast health, or radiology; should provide information in languages other than English; and should allow individuals to leave a voicemail message regarding a mammogram appointment. In addition, voicemail messages should also provide an alternate number to call to schedule a mammogram, not just an emergency number.

Appendix A

HHC Facilities Offering Free or Low-Cost Mammograms and Their Telephone Numbers, As Provided by 311 on July 3, 2006

HHC Facility, by borough	Telephone Number
BRONX	
Segundo Ruiz Belvis	718-579-4013*
Jacobi Medical Center	718-918-4600
Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center	718-579-5550
Morrisania Diagnostic and Treatment Center	718-579-4785*
North Central Bronx Hospital	718-519-3092
BROOKLYN	
Coney Island Hospital	718-616-4055
Cumberland Diagnostic and Treatment Center	718-388-5889**
East New York Diagnostic and Treatment Center	718-240-0400*
Kings Co. Hospital Center	718-245-3267
Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center	718-388-5889**
MANHATTAN	
Bellevue Hospital Center	212-562-4384*
Gouverneur Healthcare Services	212-238-7897*
Harlem Hospital Center	212-939-8043*
QUEENS	
Elmhurst Hospital Center	718-334-3150*
Queens Hospital Center	718-883-4509
STATEN ISLAND	
NONE	

* These telephone numbers provided by 311 did not connect callers to the correct staff to make a mammogram appointment.

** The same number was provided for two facilities.