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PURPOSE / OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this assessment was to identify and describe the **barriers and opportunities** in the continuum of care, for women living **outside of Panama City** and **indigenous women** in Panama.

The study: **DESCRIBES** ▶ the perception women and health personnel have about specific barriers and opportunities throughout the breast cancer continuum of care;

DISCUSSES ▶ access to breast health services for women outside of Panama City (including indigenous groups);

ADDRESSES ▶ limitations in the availability of health services for the detection of breast cancer for women in non-indigenous communities in the provinces of Los Santos, Chiriquí, Veraguas.

CONTRIBUTORS:

53 key stakeholders and

113 women were for this assessment

8 A total of eight **focus groups** were conducted:

- 1** in the province of Chiriquí with the participation of 16 patients;
- 3** sessions in the province of Herrera with a total of 21 patients;
- 2** in the province of Los Santos, 20 women;
- 2** in the province of Veraguas with 16 breast cancer survivors.

3 Three additional focus groups were conducted with **indigenous women**:

- 2** sessions with the participation of women from the Guna ethnicity (18 participants);
- 1** session with women from the Ngäbe ethnicity (15 participants).

2

BREAST CANCER IN PANAMA



Panama's population was estimated at 3.4 million people in 2010. The population of the **Panama City** Metropolitan area was approximately **1.5 million people**, with 880,691 residing in Panama City.

In 2010, the incidence of breast cancer in Panama was **43.6 cases** per 100,000 women and a rate of **10 deaths** per 100,000 women.

Breast cancer is the **primary type of cancer** among Panama women and the mortality rates had been **increasing**.



At the **secondary** level of Care in Panama City, there are only **two** Ministry of Health (MINSA), centers and **5** Social Security Fund (CSS) clinics. For the tertiary level, there was the public health service and a CSS center, as well as the National Oncological Institute (ION).

The health care system comprised of three sectors: The **CSS** which is the largest health care provider, covering 85% of the population, the **MINSA** and the **Private Sector** which covers approximately 16% of the population.



The **first** level of care In Panama City has **8** MINSA health centers and **three** social security service (CSS) health centers.

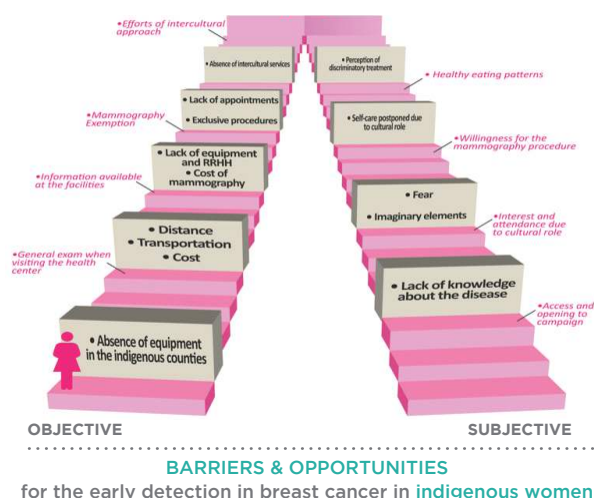
In 2011, The Ministry of Health (MINSA) created a **National Cancer Plan**, which included the establishment of training programs for a **comprehensive approach** to the continuum of breast health care, **detecting early** breast cancer, and **promoting breast cancer**.

3 BARRIERS & OPPORTUNITIES

The difference in breast cancer early detection between indigenous and rural women is based on the identified subjective barriers. **Women living outside of Panama City demonstrated more predispositions to utilizing the local health facilities,**



while **indigenous women** for, the most part, expressed a tendency towards **traditional medicine** rather than utilizing local health services. **Language barriers** as well as the perceived **absence of an intercultural perspective** in the delivery of health services according to respondent hinder communication between doctor and patient



4 RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE BREAST CANCER CARE

- 1 Establish continuous education programs** for stakeholders fighting breast cancer.
- 2 Ensure adequate distribution** of screening equipment and staff with the technical capacity to perform the related services is needed to ensure proper coverage for the entire country.
- 3 Develop education programs** to encourage women to prioritize their breast health instead of postponing care.
- 4 Institutionalize policies and programs** for breast cancer care that will reduce the challenges and barriers identified by indigenous women living outside of Panama City.
- 5 Improve access to support** groups, psychologists, and psychiatrists to help manage the psychosocial aspects of being a breast cancer patient and survivor.