



## We promote early cancer detection.

Cancer screening saves lives. In earlier stages, cancer is more treatable, and survival more likely. Because of this, many health departments actively promote cancer screening to the communities they serve, including those groups who may experience barriers to accessing preventative care.

According to information from [Montana Cancer Control Plan](#), "Cancer survival among American Indian residents of Montana is slightly lower than survival for all Montana residents diagnosed between 1998 and 2002." The report explains that the lower survival rate for American Indians in Montana is partly attributable to not being diagnosed until later stages of the disease.

To improve cancer survival rates for American Indians, staff at [RiverStone Health](#), Yellowstone County's public health organization in south-central Montana, began organizing annual bingo events in 2009. These events are designed to improve breast and cervical cancer screening rates for American Indian women in both urban and reservation settings. The bingo events are offered at no cost and take place in Billings and on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations.

Kassie Runsabove, the coordinator for the program says, "Health can be fun. It doesn't always need to be serious. What the women need to hear is that screenings are to make sure you are healthy. Using a positive approach is much better than using scare tactics or traumatic stories."

Along with the fun of relaxing with friends and family, attendees receive clear information about how to get screened for breast and cervical cancer. All participants are given an enrollment form for the Montana Cancer Screening Program to fill out. They are also encouraged to visit a variety of booths to learn more about community resources relevant to reproductive health, senior services, and low-income housing. Depending on the time of year, flu shots are available.

Once seated, participants are served a hot meal. Typically they play five games of "regular" bingo and then finish up with a version of the game that is intended to help participants learn more about breast and cervical cancer prevention. In addition to the games, the women participate in drawing for prizes. In the past, area businesses have donated bicycles, a Wii, and a \$150 Walmart gift card.

At the end of the evening, the women turn in their screening enrollment forms. Runsabove then contacts each participant to help her schedule screening appointments. If a woman is diagnosed with cancer as a result of a screening, Runsabove helps get her connected to Medicaid, or other programs for which she may qualify. Because of these efforts, RiverStone Health can document a 124 percent increase in screenings among the American Indian women they serve.

Runsabove says that there is a range of women who attend these events. Some women have health insurance but don't know they should be accessing screenings. Others, perhaps due to family members who have cancer, know that they need to get screened but don't have insurance. Some younger women may not have had anyone tell them about cervical health, and those who are experiencing a crisis of some kind can talk in a safe place.

Runsabove and her colleagues are continuously shown what these events mean to the communities they serve. In 2011, only one week prior to the scheduled bingo, one of the reservations suffered a tragic event. When Runsabove asked the organizers what they wanted to do, they said, "Let's have the bingo night. Cancer doesn't wait. We shouldn't either." Two hundred women attended that night.