Bridging the gap: Mammogram uptake patterns and the critical role of subsidies in expanding access among underserved women in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Breast cancer remains the most common cancer among Malaysian women. Early detection through mammography significantly improves survival outcomes; however, access is uneven across socioeconomic groups. Government and NGO-funded subsidy programs aim to reduce financial barriers, particularly for the B40 and M40 populations. Objective: To evaluate mammogram uptake by payment type, age group, and patient status (new versus returning), and to assess the impact of subsidy programs on improving screening accessibility among socioeconomically disadvantaged women. **Materials and Methods:** A retrospective review was conducted of all mammograms performed in 2024 at a community-based screening clinic. Screenings were categorized by payment status (self-paid versus subsidized), age group and patient type (new versus returning). Subsidies were provided through multiple programs, including LPPKN, Etiqa, Perkeso, Estee Lauder, and Selcare. **Results:** A total of 5,797 mammograms were conducted during the study period. Among these, 236 (4.1%) were self-paid, predominantly by women from the T20 income group, with 104 new and 132 returning patients. The subsidized cohort comprised 5,561 mammograms (96.2%), including 3,484 new and 2,077 returning patients. Age distribution within the subsidized group was as follows: 40-49 years (1,186), 50–59 years (1,987), 60–69 years (1,770) and 70–79 years (618). Notably, women aged 40–59 accounted for 57% of subsidized screenings - a key demographic for early breast cancer detection. **Conclusion:** Subsidy programs are vital to ensuring equitable access to mammographic screening among Malaysia's underserved populations. The high proportion of subsidized screenings, particularly among first-time attendees from the B40 and M40 groups, underscores the importance of financial support in overcoming barriers to early detection. Continued investment and policy backing for these subsidy initiatives are essential components of Malaysia's national cancer control strategy and efforts to reduce disparities in cancer outcomes.

Keywords: subsidy programs, breast screening, Malaysia, mammogram uptake, health equity