



Cervical Cancer Among Farmworker Women: Prevalence and Best Practices

By: Farmworker Justice & Health Outreach Partners

To better understand the impact of cervical cancer among farmworker women, we must recognize the level of awareness regarding the disease and the available care within this population. To achieve this, Farmworker Justice and Health Outreach Partners convened two listening sessions during the 2023-2024 East Coast Stream Forum and Midwest Stream Forum (now known as the Agricultural Worker Health Symposia). During the “Cervical Cancer in Farmworker Families” sessions, participants received an overview of cervical cancer and the innovative approaches that exist for prevention and screening. Participants from community health centers, primary care associations, and community-based organizations then had the opportunity to share challenges and promising practices associated with cervical cancer screenings in their communities. This report aims to convey the participants' insights and highlight promising practices in educating farmworker communities about cervical cancer.

Background on Cervical Cancer

There are multiple challenges regarding access to cancer screenings in farmworker communities. A study that compiled the data from nineteen different articles identified the challenges most mentioned by farmworker women, including a lack of cancer knowledge, issues with cost and insurance, and fear.¹ The study found that personal beliefs played a

¹ Pariser, A., Hirko, K. A., Muñoz, G. M., Pico-Gleason, G., Robinson, C., & Kerver, J. M. (2022). *Journal of primary care & community health*, 13, 21501319211073252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21501319211073252>

significant role in access to care. Two articles noted that farmworker women have anxiety or aversion to seeking care due to the possibility of a male healthcare provider performing the exam. The study also revealed that women who had resided in the United States for longer periods were more likely to have completed their recommended cervical cancer screenings. This indicates that personal and community beliefs play a strong contributing role in farmworker women's choice to access cervical cancer screenings.

Agricultural workers often lack access to programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the ACA marketplaces. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), 48% of farmworkers report having health insurance. Among those insured, 26% received employer-provided health insurance, while 39% received health insurance through a government program.² Additionally, given the seasonal nature of farm work, farmworkers often have unstable incomes and access to health insurance. This lack of health insurance, combined with the high cost of health care, leads many farmworkers to seek health care only when symptoms arise, rather than pay for preventative health care.³ While access to care might be sporadic, a 2012 study found that farmworker women with insurance (64.9%) were significantly more likely to have received cervical cancer screenings.⁴

Findings from Listening Sessions

Understanding the challenges that farmworker women face in accessing cervical cancer care is imperative to provide adequate care for this community. Below are some recommendations encapsulating the best practices shared by participants in the listening sessions aimed at improving cervical cancer prevention among farmworker women.

² (n.d.). *Findings from the Quality of and Access to Health Care Supplement of the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2019–2020*. Department of Labor. Retrieved March 18, 2025, from <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/naws/pdfs/NAWS%20Research%20Brief%201.pdf>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Castañeda, S. F., Rosenbaum, R. P., Gonzalez, P., & Holscher, J. T. (2012). *Journal of primary care & community health*, 3(2), 104–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2150131911422913>

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1. Some agricultural workers travel to follow the harvest throughout the year. Understanding which states they work in will help provide accurate information on how they can continue to access care as they move.
 2. There is a significant amount of stigma and misinformation within the farmworker community regarding care for gynecological health, especially concerning cervical cancer screenings. Providing accurate information to patients is crucial to overcoming the stigma.
 3. Many women in the farmworker community feel shame when seeking care for issues related to their gynecological health. To provide better care, it is essential to build trust with patients and understand that farmworker women might feel more comfortable with a woman-led healthcare team. Consistency through familiar staff and regular care is an important cornerstone of building trust.
 4. It is critical that health centers, particularly community health workers and outreach staff, have access to up-to-date resources on gynecological health and cervical cancer. This knowledge is vital to educating farmworkers about their health and how to obtain it.
 5. While many resources are available about gynecological health and cervical cancer, ensuring that these resources are accessible and effective is an important step in guaranteeing that farmworker communities have appropriate information.
 6. Although farmworkers may want to obtain care, they often face challenges such as being unable to take time off during work hours or arranging transportation to clinics. Developing a mobile health program that operates in workplaces, health fairs, and other community events would facilitate easier access to care for farmworkers.

Recommendations for Improved Outcomes

This report highlights not only the lack of information about cervical cancer among farmworker communities but also outlines the various best practices that have emerged among health centers, community health workers, and outreach staff to help these individuals access appropriate care. While established best practices are helpful, some areas could be improved and should be prioritized for further training.

1. Improved cervical cancer data in the farmworker community

To ensure optimal care and education for the farmworker community, it is essential to collect better data on the prevalence of cervical cancer and increase awareness about the issue. This will facilitate the development of additional resources and more effectively target the community, ultimately leading to better outcomes.

2. Increased utilization of outreach

Accessing care remains challenging for farmworkers due to various challenges within their community, even when they have a desire to seek care. To improve access to cervical cancer prevention, it is important to develop outreach programs that specifically reach farmworkers in their communities. These programs should take place in familiar locations such as grocery stores, laundromats, and community event spaces where farmworkers gather. Collaborating with community-based organizations that frequently interact with farmworkers, along with organizing community events, will help build trust in the healthcare system. This approach will enable farmworkers to obtain initial care in accessible spaces where they feel safe.

For more information, visit our websites at www.farmworkerjustice.org and www.outreach-partners.org.

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