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DOH Launches Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign with Focus on Early Detection

October's events aim to boost awareness across the territory, urging women and men to prioritize screenings and participate in community activities for better health outcomes

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The V.I. Department of Health is amplifying its efforts to fight cancer in the community, with a special focus on early detection of breast cancer, which DOH revealed is the second most common form of the disease in the territory.

As October marks Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the department is hosting events on St. Thomas and St. Croix to raise awareness and encourage residents to take proactive steps for their health.

“Early detection remains a priority in our efforts to address cancer care in the territory,” said Dr. Lyna Fredericks, director of the Chronic Disease Prevention Division at the Department of Health. “This year, we introduced the USVI Cancer Plan, which outlines our strategy to collaborate with government and community partners to tackle the cancer burden here in the Virgin Islands.”

The USVI Cancer Plan aims to improve health equity, expand access to cancer care, and enhance data collection efforts to guide health programs and policy decisions, according to DOH. The department said its strategy is designed to support collaborative initiatives that lower the number of new cancer cases and improve outcomes for patients in the territory. The plan can be accessed online through the Department of Health’s [website](#).

Despite these efforts, Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion spoke about the importance of personal responsibility, particularly among women aged 40 and older. “Even with these initiatives in place, women aged 40 and older must take the personal step of performing regular breast self-exams and scheduling annual mammograms,” said Encarnacion. She also encouraged younger women with a family history of breast or other cancers to prioritize screenings. “It’s important to note that men can also get breast cancer. If there is a family history, we encourage them to speak with their healthcare provider.”

As part of the observance of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Department of Health is organizing a series of events aimed at spreading the message of early detection and supporting those affected by the disease:

- Breast Cancer Awareness Walk and Trunk-n-Treat: Scheduled for Saturday, October 26, at 5:30 p.m. The walk will start at Emile Griffith Park on St. Thomas, offering an opportunity for the community to come together in support of breast cancer awareness.
- Third Annual Men’s & Women’s Health Affair: Set for Sunday, October 27, at 11 a.m. at the University of the Virgin Islands’ Great Hall on St. Croix. The event will feature health resources and information geared towards promoting wellness.
- Stomp Out Breast Cancer Awareness Walk: In collaboration with the Juan F. Luis Hospital, this walk will take place on Wednesday, October 30, at 3:30 p.m., beginning at the Viya Building on St. Croix. The initiative aims to encourage the community to join in the fight against breast cancer.

DOH expressed its committed to providing support to individuals currently battling breast cancer, as well as survivors and their caregivers. “A breast cancer diagnosis is life-altering, and we stand with them, advocating for greater support,” said Encarnacion.