

'Pink ribbon dollars' help fill financial gaps for breast cancer programs

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A new study shows that donations collected by check boxes on state income tax forms, fees from license plates and revenue from state lottery tickets have raised millions for breast cancer research and prevention programs across the country, according to researchers at Washington University in St. Louis.

"We found that revenue-generating [breast cancer](#) initiatives can be a successful strategy for states to raise funds, or 'pink ribbon dollars,' for prevention and [early detection](#) programs," says Amy A. Eyler, PhD, research associate professor at the Brown School of Social Work and the Prevention Research Center at Washington University in St. Louis.

The findings are available online and will be published in the September-October 2011 issue of *Public Health Reports*.

Proceeds from these revenue-generating initiatives fund breast cancer research foundations or state's early detection and prevention efforts.

By reviewing state legislation on breast cancer funding between 2001-09, the researchers found that 18 states had programs that allow taxpayers to check a box on state income tax forms to donate part of their refund to breast cancer programs.

The median annual state revenue for breast cancer research and [prevention programs](#) collected through the income tax check-off was \$115,000, according to Eyler.

Twenty-six states also had breast cancer license plates that generated more than \$4.1 million in revenue. As of August 2010, Missouri had raised \$25,750.

The extra cost of specialized plates for each consumer ranged from \$20 to \$75, depending on the state. Residents can order the specialty license plates for an extra annual fee, a percentage of which goes to a specified cause or organization. Currently, the number of specialty plates offered per state ranges from one in New Hampshire to more than 800 in Maryland. Missouri offers almost 200 specialty plates.

"We also discovered that states with medium or high breast cancer death rates were 2.5 times more likely to offer breast cancer specialty license plates than states with low breast cancer death rates," says Ross Brownson, PhD, another study author and a professor at the School of Medicine and the Brown School. He also is a faculty scholar of Washington University's Institute for Public Health.

Only Illinois offered a state breast cancer lottery ticket, which raised \$4 million from 2005-09.

"Overall, we found that many organizations can benefit from funds collected through state check-offs, license plates and specialty lottery tickets," says Eyler, also a faculty scholar of Washington University's Institute for Public Health. "The longevity of many of these initiatives demonstrates public support and success in raising funds for [breast cancer research](#), early detection and education initiatives within states."

Provided by Washington University School of Medicine

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