

Dense breast notifications are having little impact

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Dense Breast Notifications (DBNs) are having little impact.

DBNs are a written notification to a [woman](#) after a mammogram that her breasts are dense. The goal is to motivate her speak with her doctor about her personal risk and possibly obtain supplemental screening for breast cancer. DBNs are mandated legislatively in more than 35 states and the Food Drug Administration (FDA) is developing standardized language for a federal/nationwide notification.

Prior findings from researchers at Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) showed many states' DBNs are written at a higher literacy level than women residing in that state, which suggests that women may not be able to understand the notifications. Now those same researchers have conducted one of the first national surveys to ask women about their reactions to these notifications and to understand their knowledge, awareness and plans about breast density while examining whether these

findings vary among women of varying race/ethnicity groups.

Overall, they found few differences in responses between women residing in states that require DBNs versus those who do not. There were no differences in awareness that women with dense breasts have a slightly increased risk of breast cancer, and no differences in the proportion of women who had discussed breast density with their doctor. "This suggests that DBNs are not achieving their desired effects, which is contrary to their goal," explained corresponding author Nancy Kressin, Ph.D., professor of medicine at BUSM. They also found [white women](#) with [higher incomes](#) had more knowledge when it came to breast density while [black women](#) experienced greater anxiety and confusion. "This is particularly concerning given black women's greater mortality from [breast cancer](#) ."

The researchers hope that the FDA will consider these findings as they develop language for federal notifications regarding [breast density](#), in order to ensure that the wording of the federal notification is clear and understandable to all [women](#) and that it leads to the desired outcomes and that unintended harms do not occur.

These findings appear online in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

More information: Nancy R. Kressin et al, Differences in Breast Density Awareness, Knowledge, and Plans Based on State Legislation Status and Sociodemographic Characteristics, *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s11606-019-05578-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-019-05578-3)

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