

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 30, 2019

Thomas McCaffery
Assistant Secretary of Health Affairs
U.S. Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Mr. McCaffery:

On behalf of our nation's servicemembers, military family members, and veterans, we write to express our concern with TRICARE's current breast cancer screening coverage options, and urge the Military Health System (MHS) to take action. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women, exceeded only by lung cancer. However, when detected in an early and localized stage, overall chance of survival increases dramatically, which is why accurate and efficient screening is essential.

While digital mammography screening is covered by TRICARE, the technology only provides a two-dimensional image of the breast and therefore has inherent limitations in detecting cancer. Digital Breast Tomosynthesis (also known as DBT or 3D mammography), which is now the standard of care in all 50 states, was developed to address the limitations of two-dimensional imaging by allowing the breast to be examined layer by layer. Hundreds of recent studies have shown that DBT is superior in breast cancer detection, as well as in the reduction of unnecessary recalls from screening. Currently, TRICARE is the only national payer that does not cover preventative screening with DBT, creating a lower standard of care for the women who serve in our armed forces. It is only upon discovering a lump in which TRICARE covers 3D mammograms. We ask that the MHS address this disservice to those who protect our country, and we urge TRICARE to promptly implement positive coverage for DBT screening.

In the United States, 93 percent of women aged 40-74 have insurance coverage and reimbursement for DBT through Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance (including United, Aetna, Anthem, Cigna, and Humana). In 2015, Medicare established coverage and reimbursement for all Medicare beneficiaries, both in screening and diagnostic testing. Additionally, the Department of Veterans Affairs has established DBT as an approved breast cancer screening procedure under the medical benefits package. Without coverage from TRICARE, many servicewomen are unable to receive the optimal care to which other women have access, or are forced to pay out-of-pocket for the exam. The 2019 Medicare national average for a DBT screening exam is \$55.86, a cost that is minimal in comparison to the cost of additional testing and treatment that may be required if cancer is not detected in its early stages. DBT has now been on the market for seven years, and we strongly urge coverage to be added for TRICARE beneficiaries.

Providing superior care to our servicemembers should be a top priority for the MHS. The lack of coverage for DBT denies women who served or currently serve in the armed forces the most effective imaging option, particularly for women with dense breast tissue. Over 250 peer reviewed clinical studies have demonstrated that DBT provides earlier breast cancer detection, including detection of 20 to 65 percent of more invasive breast cancer. It also reduces the chance of callbacks or additional screening by nearly 40 percent, which means greater cost effectiveness overall. The 3D imaging capability, which more than 50 percent of mammography machines in the United States possess, allows for superior breast cancer detection in women with dense breast tissue. The federal government is now requiring mammography providers to inform all patients of their breast density, a known risk factor for breast cancer. This implies that some of our servicemembers on TRICARE will receive a notice that they may be at risk, but will be denied coverage for screening with DBT.

TRICARE remains the only national payer that does not provide coverage for DBT, and their beneficiaries continue to be put at a disadvantage. We urge you to implement coverage for DBT so that our servicemembers are provided with the efficient screening and care they deserve.

Sincerely,



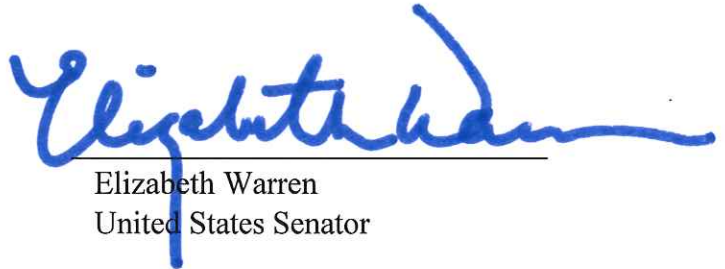
Martha McSally
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
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