Cervical and breast cancer are both treatable if detected early. However, women with intellectual disabilities receive screening for cervical and breast cancer at lower rates than their peers without disabilities. Women with intellectual disabilities face a number of barriers to screening receipt including a lack of knowledge or understanding about exams, anxiety or fear, and absence of recommendation by physician.

Women Be Healthy is a course designed to teach adult women with intellectual disabilities about cervical and breast cancer screening. The course aims to help women understand the purpose of the screening exams, what happens when the physician performs the procedure, how to relax through deep breathing exercises, and how to advocate for appropriate health care. Women Be Healthy was originally designed as an 8-week, 12 hour course. It has now evolved to an 11-week series with 22 hours of class time.

Through funding from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, female instructors from across North Carolina have received training on how to teach the Women Be Healthy course. To date, approximately 65 instructors from 18 counties have received training on the Women Be Healthy curriculum. Of those instructors, 19 taught as a part of a 3-year randomized controlled trial funded by NIDRR. In addition, the study enrolled 202 women with intellectual disabilities. Of those women, 149 have received the Women Be Healthy course.

Outreach across North Carolina: Counties involved in the WBH study

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