

## **Meeting Men Where They Are: Insights to Improve Cancer Screening Uptake in Dallas-Fort Worth**

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### **1. Background**

Men have lower cancer screening rates and later diagnoses than women, yet are underrepresented in cancer center prevention outreach. Persistent gaps exist in understanding how cultural identity, masculinity, and structural barriers influence men's cancer screening decisions and how cancer centers can address them. Guided by the Person, Extended Family, and Neighborhood (Cultural Identity); Perceptions, Enablers, and Nurturers (Relationships and Expectations); and Positive, Existential, and Negative (Cultural Empowerment) (PEN-3) framework, we explored men's perspectives, motivations, and preferred strategies to inform culturally grounded intervention.

### **2. Goals**

Within the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center catchment area, our goals were to:

- Evaluate men's perceptions of cancer screening and support cancer awareness, prevention, and screening uptake
- Identify motivators for men to seek cancer services
- Expand knowledge of factors associated with men's access and awareness
- Identify role of masculinity in accessing services

### **3. Solutions and Methods**

We conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups to listen to men's perspectives on cancer screening and potential strategies to improve outcomes. Eligible participants were men, age 35+, residing within the cancer center catchment area, who had not previously had a cancer diagnosis. Between August and November 2025, we recruited participants using a network sampling strategy that leveraged existing relationships with community organizations. Rapid thematic analysis incorporated the PEN-3 dimensions: Cultural Identity, Relationships and Expectations, and Cultural Empowerment.

### **4. Outcomes**

We spoke with 52 men, ages 35-72. Men's beliefs about their cultural identity, relationships to family and friends, and culturally empowering messages and venues strongly informed participant perspectives and recommendations for effective messaging on cancer screening and preventive care.

Masculinity emerged through all of these dimensions as both a barrier to screening and a powerful motivator. Perceptions of masculinity influenced when and how men seek care, how it is discussed among peers, and men's suggestions about what messages will best promote uptake of cancer screening. For some, showing vulnerability, such as seeking health care, was perceived as undermining their male identity. Men reported avoiding care so long as symptoms did not disrupt daily life. For others, masculinity was tied to prioritizing family needs. Within this paternalistic framework, maintaining one's own health was considered essential to fulfilling responsibilities as a provider.

These contrasting views of masculinity shaped how men discussed health in peer relationships. Some expressed reluctance to discuss health, while others noted intentionally sharing personal health experiences. These disclosures were often framed as intimate and purposeful, aimed at motivating action. Many

respondents emphasized the potential of masculine framing in health messaging to motivate men. They encouraged appealing to values like protecting family and friends and leveraging motivators such as paternalism, competitiveness, and even crass humor. Outreach efforts should focus on physical locations where men are already engaging in caring for others. Outreach at employment venues, kids' schools, youth sports, barbershops, and churches, offer locations where men are present and may be well suited to health messages.

#### **5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions**

Findings suggest that interventions for men must acknowledge both the reluctance to appear vulnerable and the powerful motivating role of responsibility men feel toward family and community. Programs that incorporate masculine framings and are delivered in familiar, relationship-rich settings may better resonate with men's lived experiences. Cancer centers can improve cancer screening rates among men by embedding these culturally informed strategies into outreach and messaging.