BREAST CANCER ACTION

ROOT CAUSES

CHANGE PEOPLE OVER PROFITS

JUSTICE HUMAN RIGHTS

EDUCATE

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

2014–2019

INDEPENDENT VOICE

WATCHDOG

EPIDEMIC grassroots fear less

HARD TRUTHS

STRATEGIC PLAN

BREAST CANCER ACTION
BARBARA A. BRENNER
1951–2013

With deep gratitude and appreciation for a lifetime of activism, we dedicate this Strategic Plan to Barbara Brenner. Brenner was Breast Cancer Action’s first full-time executive director (1995–2010). She was a social justice activist of the first order, unafraid of controversy, deeply compassionate, and relentlessly committed to addressing and ending the breast cancer epidemic. She changed the world in tangible ways for women living with and at risk of the disease. Her fierce integrity and unapologetic demand for change solidified the voice that defines Breast Cancer Action today. Barbara Brenner’s involvement was integral during the creation of our previous Strategic Plan, and she played a significant role in ensuring that we fulfilled many of its goals.
In May 2014, the Breast Cancer Action Board of Directors approved our Strategic Plan for the years 2014–2019. This plan is the result of many inclusive discussions about the future of Breast Cancer Action that drew upon the wisdom and imagination of hundreds of people across our richly diverse community.

This plan is a living document that represents our best efforts to articulate a clear set of strategic initiatives, outcomes, and tactics that will carry forward our history of activism and create a future that is healthier and more just for people in all communities living with and at risk of breast cancer. One of the biggest differences between this plan and the previous plan is the heightening of our commitment to social justice, which is now reflected at the very heart of our mission statement, values, vision for the future, and program priorities.

As we head into our 25th anniversary year, we are excited to launch our new Strategic Plan and grateful to everyone, including our Board, staff, members, funders, allies, and partners, who gave so generously of their time and insights to help create it.

Warmly,

Karuna Jaggar
Executive Director
Breast Cancer Action

A Brief History of Breast Cancer Action

In 1990, a group of women living with breast cancer in the San Francisco Bay Area were seeking information about the causes and treatment of their disease. They encountered unresponsive government agencies and private organizations that provided inadequate, superficial information—not the evidence-based data they were looking for. They got angry and turned that anger into action by forming Breast Cancer Action.

The first meeting was held in founder Elenore Pred’s living room. “We are meeting to organize Breast Cancer Action,” the flyer for the meeting announced. “Our goals are education and political action to prevent a further rise in breast cancer.” One of the group’s first acts was a meeting with the director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to demand that the agency address the breast cancer epidemic. Founding members Elenore Pred, Susan Claymon, Belle Shayer, and Linda Reyes attended this meeting along with other breast cancer activists. Later, following the death of Elenore Pred, Susan Claymon became the first breast cancer activist to address the President’s Cancer Panel in Washington, D.C.

The actions of these founding women framed breast cancer not as an individual problem but as a public health crisis requiring systemic solutions, with an emphasis on empowering women living with and at risk of the disease.

In the years following, the organization grew in size and influence. In 2008, Breast Cancer Action fine-tuned its priorities, creating a Strategic Plan that focused attention on three areas:

✔ Putting patients before profits in FDA advocacy and breast cancer screening
✔ Creating healthy environments
✔ Ending inequities in breast cancer—political, economic, and racial—that lead to health disparities in health outcomes

In March 2011, Karuna Jaggar transitioned into the role of executive director of Breast Cancer Action, and her vision for the future is at the heart of this Strategic Plan. Under her leadership, Breast Cancer Action remains a feminist grassroots organization committed to social justice, standing at the forefront of breast cancer activism, and known nationally as the watchdog of the breast cancer movement.

WELCOME TO BREAST CANCER ACTION’S 2014-2019 STRATEGIC PLAN

Warmly,

Karuna Jaggar
Executive Director
Breast Cancer Action
Breast Cancer Action has fostered systemic change necessary to address and end the epidemic, and we’ve achieved many milestones along the way. From our position as the first breast cancer organization to refuse funding from corporations that profit from or contribute to breast cancer, to our direct action on the lawns of Genentech that opened the door to “compassionate access” to the experimental drug Herceptin, to our Think Before You Pink® campaign, calling out breast cancer profiteers and demanding an end to the hypocrisy of pinkwashing, Breast Cancer Action has acted as a trusted, independent, and inspired voice for change in the breast cancer movement.

Since we adopted our last Strategic Plan in 2008, we’ve made sure that the interests of people living with and at risk of breast cancer are front and center when it comes to resources, drug approval, environmental health, corporate accountability, and the social inequities that underlie the breast cancer epidemic. We are proud to share some of our milestones from the past six years:

Endings Human Gene Patents:
In June 2013, Breast Cancer Action celebrated a landmark victory when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that patents on DNA were invalid. Breast Cancer Action was the only national breast cancer organization that was a plaintiff in this historic case. Alongside genetic counselors, researchers, and individual patients, we challenged biotech giant Myriad Genetics’s patents on the BRCA 1 & 2 genes, often referred to as the “breast cancer genes.” These patents were one of the single greatest barriers to breast cancer research, improved testing, new diagnostic tools, and targeted therapies. The case, first filed in 2009, was argued before the Court by the American Civil Liberties Union in April 2013. The decision is a watershed moment in women’s health and a tremendous step forward for women with a known or suspected inherited risk of breast cancer.

Putting Patients First:
Breast Cancer Action continues a long tradition of standing up for evidence-based research when it comes to drug approval by demanding that any new drug or treatment improves overall survival or quality of life, or costs less than other comparable drugs already on the market. Over the last six years, Breast Cancer Action has advocated at the FDA about numerous drugs, including Avastin, T-DM1, and pertuzumab, as well as working to hold the FDA accountable on its accelerated drug approval process.

We provided thousands of women with much-needed, evidence-based information about the treatment side effects from aromatase inhibitors (AIs), with the release of our widely disseminated Side Effects Revisited: Women’s Experiences with Aromatase Inhibitors.

Confronting the Hypocrisy of Pinkwashing:
Two award-winning Think Before You Pink® campaigns drew national attention and achieved an end to some egregious exploitation of the disease: What the Cluck? prematurely ended Buckets for the Cure, the pinkwashing partnership between KFC and Susan G. Komen that targeted low-income communities already disproportionately affected by health issues like obesity, diabetes, and breast cancer. The campaign drew media attention from multiple sources, including The Colbert Report. Our Yoplait: Put a Lid on It campaign led to General Mills removing the cancer-linked synthetic growth hormone rBGH from Yoplait yogurt sold with pink ribbon lids in support of “breast cancer awareness.” When Dannon followed suit within weeks, two-thirds of the dairy market became rBGH-free.
Stopping Cancer Before It Starts:
Using the power of collective action, we partnered with national health and environmental organizations to pressure federal and state legislators to improve public health and safety at a systemic level around strong reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and the creation of a Safe Cosmetics and Personal Products Act.

As the only women’s health advocacy organization to become a founding member of the Americans Against Fracking coalition, we serve as a leading voice of opposition to hydraulic fracturing or “fracking.” This hazardous process severely threatens public health because of its use of inherently toxic chemicals, many of which are linked to breast cancer.

The State of the Breast Cancer Epidemic

More than 30 years after the launch of the breast cancer awareness movement and the introduction of the pink ribbon, breast cancer remains a public health crisis and a social justice issue. However, the mainstream breast cancer movement remains squarely focused on pink ribbons, “awareness” campaigns, and mammography screening.

This focus fails to address the systemic issues at the heart of this epidemic, instead emphasizing individual risk and individual solutions. So when the discussion turns to environmental risk factors and prevention, for example, the burden of responsibility often lands on individuals, as if diet, exercise, and education alone could address a widespread environmental crisis. We know that even eating, drinking and living as healthy a life as possible still leaves all of us involuntarily exposed to a toxic soup of substances that cannot be avoided in everyday life.

Strategies for prevention that rely on individual “lifestyle choices” alone fail to produce results that significantly change the course of this epidemic.

As a result, each year nearly a quarter of a million women continue to be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer, and each year 40,000 women die of the disease. Women of color carry a disproportionate burden of the disease, for example, black women are 40 percent more likely to die of breast cancer than their white counterparts. Furthermore, in the 1960s, a woman’s lifetime risk of breast cancer was one in 20; today, it’s one in eight.

Activists and researchers have achieved some significant accomplishments over the years. Women with breast cancer no longer live and die in silence. Women are no longer routinely subjected to radical mastectomies. Research has brought some new treatments, and emerging science around environmental links to breast cancer is generating demand for strong regulation of toxic chemicals.

Among the endless sea of breast cancer charities, corporate donors, and pharmaceutical-funded research agendas, the independent voice that defines Breast Cancer Action has never been more urgently needed, and our relevance as an activist watchdog organization is greater than ever. We need an approach that will have a significant impact on incidence and mortality. We need systemic solutions that get at the roots of this epidemic.
As a result of our work, the course of the breast cancer epidemic has changed for the better, yet we are well aware that much work remains. From the moment we began the strategic planning process in the spring of 2013, the staff and Board of Directors of Breast Cancer Action were committed to community-oriented, data-driven research. We contacted the Breast Cancer Action community and beyond so we could get a clear understanding of how well we’ve been doing, how we could strengthen our work, and the critical niche we need to occupy during the next five years.

We distributed a 31-question survey to members and partners, both electronically and by mail. An independent facilitator conducted focus groups and one-on-one interviews with leaders in the field, constituents, former Board members, and donors. We conducted an external landscape analysis, looking at how Breast Cancer Action compared to over 30 women’s health, social, and environmental justice, and breast cancer advocacy organizations. And we conducted internal program evaluations and membership analysis to gain additional organizational and campaign insights.

All in all, we received input from over 1,500 people from far and wide: people living with breast cancer, environmentalists, scientists, students, friends, partners, adversaries, and supporters. We learned a tremendous amount, and we’d like to share some of the highlights with you.

Breast Cancer Action has a wide reach and impact while being one of the smallest organizations (budget- and staff-wise) among our allies and partners. Our resources—both staff and financial—go a long way and have an impact that exceeds our actual physical size.

From our research, we found that we are unique in three primary ways:

✓ Breast Cancer Action is the only organization that addresses the breast cancer epidemic at the intersection of breast cancer, the environment, social justice, and feminism, providing us with a unique ability to understand and challenge the course of this epidemic at its social, economic, and political roots.

✓ Breast Cancer Action is the only watchdog organization in the breast cancer movement; without our crucial oversight, there would be a void in the field.

✓ Breast Cancer Action avoids conflicts of interest in our work by refusing funding from the “cancer industry,” including pharmaceutical and chemical companies, enabling us to retain our independent voice and offer truly unbiased information about breast cancer.

Overwhelmingly, people told us that Breast Cancer Action is effective and represents their concerns, and they want to know and hear more about what we do. In survey after survey and interview after interview, people described us as a fearless, truth-telling organization that provides unbiased information, and that understands and stands up for women living with breast cancer. This belief in our work inspires us as we look to the future and expand our health justice work to address and end this epidemic.

Over the next five years, as we implement the following Strategic Plan and accompanying priorities, we will work to represent the needs of women at risk of and affected by breast cancer, and we will strive to be as effective and to have as much of an impact as people tell us we’ve had over the last six years.
BREAST CANCER ACTION

BREAST CANCER ACTION recognizes that the breast cancer epidemic is a social justice issue. Breast cancer is a widespread women’s health crisis in a male-dominated and profit-driven society, and addressing and ending the breast cancer epidemic requires profound changes at every level of our society.

The breast cancer epidemic impacts communities unequally and leads to unacceptable differences in who develops breast cancer and when it develops, who gets high quality and timely treatment, and who dies from breast cancer. In order to address and end the breast cancer epidemic, we must tackle the root causes of these health inequalities, which are the result of a complex interplay of culture, power, economics, racism, and sexism.

Achieving health justice requires that each of us be free from oppressions that prevent all of us from living healthy lives in healthy communities. We believe that no single injustice can be effectively addressed in isolation, and we recognize that injustices in our society reinforce each other in many ways and at many levels.

In mainstream U.S. culture, breasts are linked to femininity, sexuality, and attractiveness. As a result, breast cancer is a highly sexualized and gendered disease. As a feminist organization with roots in the women’s health movement, we challenge the narrow definitions of femininity, womanhood, and sexuality that mainstream narratives about breast cancer impose on people at risk of and living with the disease. We recognize and honor the many ways people express their gender identity, including outside of the either/or of man/woman. We work to challenge mainstream assumptions about gender and sexuality as they relate to breast cancer risk, diagnosis, and treatment in order to make room for people of all gender identities in the breast cancer movement.

In our work for health justice, we strive to practice principled allyship by using the power and privilege we hold as an organization to build solidarity with communities who currently and/or traditionally have had less access to power, information, and resources.

OUR MISSION
Breast Cancer Action’s mission is to achieve health justice for all women at risk of and living with breast cancer

OUR VISION
A world where lives and communities aren’t threatened by breast cancer

CORE VALUES
WE BELIEVE IN:
✓ Health justice as a human right
✓ Honesty, fearlessness, and truth-telling about the breast cancer epidemic
✓ Honoring women’s diverse voices and lived experiences
✓ People’s health and well-being over corporate profits
✓ Transparency and accountability for ourselves and others
✓ Integrity and freedom from conflict of interest
✓ Collective action that changes the world for the better

Our Commitment to Social Justice

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In our work for health justice, we strive to practice principled allyship by using the power and privilege we hold as an organization to build solidarity with communities who currently and/or traditionally have had less access to power, information, and resources.
Breast cancer is a social justice issue and a public health crisis. Individual action alone, whether in terms of lifestyle or behavioral choices, is not sufficient to tackle the root causes of the breast cancer epidemic. We focus on systemic interventions that will address the root causes of the disease and produce broad public health benefits. These benefits will ensure that fewer women develop breast cancer and die from breast cancer and no community bears a disproportionate burden of diagnosis or death from this disease.

EDUCATE
We empower people with evidence-based information about breast cancer by:

✓ connecting the dots among issues related to breast cancer research, treatment, causes, and marketing in our written and oral communications; and
✓ translating the science around breast cancer into everyday language through educational materials, webinars, and one-on-one consultations.

ORGANIZE
We build collective power and challenge the status quo’s approach to breast cancer by:

✓ illuminating women’s diverse lived experiences through their stories; 
✓ developing community leaders across the United States to connect with and hear from underserved and marginalized communities affected by breast cancer; and
✓ building a grassroots movement through expanding and engaging our activist membership base, and deepening our partnerships.

TAKE ACTION
We hold the powerful accountable by:

✓ demanding patient-centered health practices and standards that follow the science; 
✓ taking action for people-centered public policies and regulations so that people and patients always come before corporate profits; and
✓ exposing hypocrisy and lack of accountability in the breast cancer industry through our communications and campaigns.

We do this work so that over the next five years we can take concrete steps toward the following outcomes:

✓ The breast cancer movement and general public will view and address the breast cancer epidemic as a public health crisis and a social justice issue.
✓ Women will have the information, resources, and support they need to make decisions about their breast cancer screening and treatment, based on their values and priorities.
✓ Healthcare standards for breast cancer will follow the evidence and put public health before corporate profits.
✓ Researchers, nonprofit organizations, and institutions will pursue a research agenda that is responsive to the needs of all women at risk of and living with the disease, including historically underserved and marginalized communities.
✓ Lawmakers and regulators will enact environmental policies that follow a precautionary approach to public health so that all communities are safe from toxic exposures that increase the risk of breast cancer.
✓ The breast cancer movement will be held accountable and will be transparent in its marketing and messaging to women living with and at risk of the disease.
The movement is accountable & transparent

Research responds to the needs of all women

Laws & regulations follow precautionary principle

Healthcare standards are based on patient-centered evidence

Connect the dots between issues

Translate the science

Illuminate diverse lived experiences

Develop community leaders

Build a grassroots movement

Expose hypocrisy

Advocate for people-centered policies and regulations

All women able to make their own screening & treatment decisions

Breast cancer is seen as a public health & social justice issue

The movement is accountable & transparent

Research responds to the needs of all women

“All of BCAction’s work is vitally important. You are my only voice in the wilderness. I love, love, love you and everything you do. Nobody else is looking out for us. You are truly our only advocate. You are my hope things can be changed.” —Anonymous

“I am so proud of BCAction’s cosponsorship of the recent Supreme Court litigation, Think Before You Pink, and countless other actions taken. You are a beacon of hope and action! Thank you for all you do!” —Anonymous

“Thank you for being one of the few organizations in the breast cancer community that “gets” it. You do not make breast cancer fluffy and shiny; you make it feel real. My sister died this year at age 32 with brain/bone mets, and most other organizations don’t say anything that feels real and honest.” —Christina Blust, BCAction member, Indiana
Priority Issue Areas

As the watchdog of the breast cancer movement, we educate, organize, and take action for systemic change in three areas:

Breast Cancer Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment
All women deserve access to evidence-based, patient-centered information so they can fully engage in their healthcare decisions. Breast cancer research, treatment, and screening must be patient-centered and responsive to the needs of women at risk of and living with breast cancer, and should not reflect corporate or industry bias that puts profits over patients.

Our work on diagnosis and treatment examines the data from a patient perspective and includes analyses of breast cancer screening; healthcare access; drug and device approval; and demands more effective, less costly, and less toxic treatments.

Root Causes of Breast Cancer
Over half of the women diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States have no known risk factors. With family history accounting for only around 10 percent of breast cancer diagnoses, a large and growing body of research indicates that toxic chemicals may increase our risk of developing the disease. In 2010, the President’s Cancer Panel reported that “the true burden of environmentally induced cancer has been grossly underestimated [and]... the American people—even before they are born—are bombarded continually with myriad combinations of these dangerous exposures.”

Individual solutions like “shopping wisely” and “choosing healthy” are insufficient to stem the driving environmental causes of the breast cancer epidemic. Only large-scale systemic change can address the root causes of breast cancer. We work to address these root causes by eliminating the involuntary exposures to hazardous and toxic chemicals present in our daily lives that put people at increased risk of breast cancer. Our work is guided by the precautionary approach to public health and true primary prevention of breast cancer.

Pink Ribbon Marketing and Culture
Breast cancer has ballooned into a multibillion-dollar industry, even as it remains a public health crisis, and the pink ribbon is now one of the most widely recognized symbols and marketing tools. The pink ribbon provides many people with a sense of community and has turned breast cancer into a topic of shared conversation rather than a shameful secret. Yet the significant lack of accountability, the absence of transparency, and the widespread hypocrisy in the pink ribbon marketing culture exploits a disease that devastates communities, misrepresents who is affected by breast cancer, and excludes and marginalizes women’s diverse lived experiences of the disease.

Our work to end the breast cancer epidemic cuts through the pink noise to tell the hard truths about this disease and challenge “pinkwashing” hypocrisy and pink ribbon culture, which have become the status quo of the breast cancer industry. We address the impact that breast cancer has on women’s lives and communities, and work to bring about the systemic changes that will end the epidemic.
We will work tirelessly and fearlessly to address and end the current breast cancer epidemic:

- Until no community bears a disproportionate burden of the disease
- Until fewer people are exposed to toxins that increase their risk of breast cancer
- Until everyone affected by breast cancer has access to unbiased information about the disease
- Until quality healthcare, and more effective and less toxic breast cancer treatments, are available and accessible to all who need it
- Until fewer women experience the harms of overdiagnosis and overtreatment
- Until people everywhere have access to the resources and opportunities they need so they can fully engage in decisions about their healthcare and overall well-being according to their values and priorities
- Until people’s health comes before corporate profits
- Until fewer people develop and/or die from this disease in the first place

We look forward to working with you over the next five years to achieve the necessary changes that will benefit women at risk of and living with breast cancer. We invite you to learn how you can get involved to change the course of the breast cancer epidemic at www.bcaction.org.

“I believe in BCAction. You do important work that no one else is doing. You’re an essential voice—you must be heard!”
—Sue Magidson, BCAction member, California

“What I respect and love about BCAction is that you are not afraid to stand up to anyone or any corporation. We need that with regard to cancer and the injustices related to this disease.”
—Faith Lightfoot, BCAction member, California

“I love the fact that BCAction fearlessly tackles controversial issues around breast cancer.”
—Anonymous

“Best cancer organization in the US!”
—Anonymous
Thank You to Our Funders and Supporters

Generous support from the Woodtiger Fund and Elaine Lissner made this strategic planning process possible. Breast Cancer Action’s strength is our dedicated grassroots network of members, donors, and activists. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to our work, and for sharing with us your thoughts and insights.