

2007 Annual Report

BREAST
CANCER
ACTION

Honoring the Past,
Charting the Future



Dear Friends,

Breast Cancer Action was born when several women who had met in a support group decided it was time to speak out about their disease, time to start asking hard questions, and time to start demanding answers.

Much has changed since BCA's founding in 1990. A disease whose name once went unspoken is now the subject of countless clinical trials, thousands of news stories, the beneficiary of hundreds of millions of dollars in donations, and the reason for the existence of numerous breast cancer organizations.

But challenges remain. Each year, breast cancer claims the lives of more than 40,000 women, and a quarter of a million women are diagnosed with the disease in the United States alone. We still need answers to the most daunting questions: Why are so many of us still getting sick and dying? How can we truly prevent this disease? How can we reduce involuntary exposures to toxins linked with breast cancer? Where are the more effective, less toxic treatments for women who are already sick, and how readily available are they? BCA's work in 2007 included asking these questions, working to facilitate answers, and distributing the information widely as it became available.

Like the women who founded BCA, the questions we ask propel this movement forward, shift research agendas, and encourage people to think in new ways. When we change the conversation, we're ultimately changing lives.

In 2007 we honored BCA's history and charted future successes. We made significant progress in key areas, including protecting patients' interests, spotlighting environmental links to breast cancer, overcoming inequities in health care, providing essential information to anyone who needs it, and taking on pinkwashers with the Think Before You Pink campaign.

"We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't," poet and breast cancer activist Audre Lorde wrote. In fact, we know that silence will mean that tens of thousands of women will continue to die of breast cancer every year. That is why we will continue to ask questions until we have the answers we need to end this epidemic. We are deeply grateful for your activism and support, which move us forward in these efforts.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Brenner
Executive Director



Denise Wells
President



Breast Cancer Action carries the voices of people affected by breast cancer to inspire and compel the changes necessary to end the epidemic.

Protecting Patients' Interests

Advocating for the interests of patients and for a public health approach at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and other federal-level agencies is a growing component of BCA's work. Central to this work is demanding more effective, less toxic breast cancer treatments and shifting the balance of power away from drug companies.

In 2007 the imbalance between patient and corporate interests at the FDA was seen in the way the agency approached Genentech's application for use of the drug Avastin as a breast cancer treatment. BCA's concerns around Avastin's efficacy and safety in breast cancer were echoed when an FDA advisory committee recommended denying the application. The FDA commissioner, however, ignored the recommendation and approved the new use for the drug. Following the commissioner's decision, BCA widely distributed its critique of the decision, asserting that the agency was lowering its standards for drug approval and putting the interests of drug companies before those of patients. We were able to make these statements publicly, because we don't accept funds from the pharmaceutical industry or any other entity that profits from cancer. BCA's concerns were included in news stories in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *San Jose Mercury News*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*.

BCA also took an early lead role in urging the FDA to look at whether the benefits outweighed the risks associated with certain anemia drugs prescribed for women with breast cancer undergoing adjuvant chemotherapy, and applauded the agency's decision to place new warning labels on the drugs.

BCA has long opposed the idea of "pills for prevention" of breast cancer, because it leads to disease substitution and distracts us from looking at the underlying causes. In June 2007 the National Cancer Institute's cancellation of STELLAR, a chemoprevention trial, was a major victory. The clinical trial would have tested the use of raloxifene against letrozole, an aromatase inhibitor, in healthy women at high risk for breast cancer. The NCI's move demonstrates that the voices and interests of breast cancer activists, like those at BCA, are being heard at the national cancer policy level.

Spotlighting Environmental Links to Breast Cancer

Working to educate our members and the public about environmental links to breast cancer has long been a core component of BCA's work. In order to truly prevent breast cancer, we need not only to know what substances in the environment are contributing to the disease but also limit exposure to them. BCA's work in this area moves beyond individual exposures and focuses on protecting public health on a large scale. As a member of several collaborative efforts in this area in 2007, some of which are discussed below, BCA often served as a bridge between the environmental health and environmental justice movements.

- ✱ In January 2007 the California Safe Cosmetics Act—which BCA cosponsored—went into effect. Recognizing the importance of following through after legislation has passed, BCA worked with staff members at the state Department of Health Services to ensure proper implementation of the new law.
- ✱ The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, of which BCA is a member, grew out of safe cosmetics work, and conducts outreach and education to nail salon workers, particularly Vietnamese women in the San Francisco Bay and Los Angeles areas. BCA supports the collaborative's policy and industry relations committees.
- ✱ BCA chaired the California Breast Cancer Research Council, helping guide the process of developing research initiatives that will focus on environmental exposures linked with breast cancer.
- ✱ We served on the outreach committee of CHANGE, Californians for a Healthy and Green Economy, which works for comprehensive chemical policy reform in the state.
- ✱ BCA is a long-standing steering committee member of Californians for Pesticide Reform, through which we advise and guide work around the state aimed at reducing pesticide exposures in our homes, schools, and workplaces.
- ✱ As a member of the Environmental Health Legislative Working Group (EHLWG), BCA staff members and activists participated in the annual Environmental Health Lobby Days in Sacramento in 2007 to advance the interests of California communities concerned about the health impact of environmental exposures.

Think Before You Pink

BCA launched its sixth year of Think Before You Pink in 2007 with a revamped web site, www.thinkbeforeyoupink.org, and a renewed spotlight on pinkwashers—companies that use pink ribbons to sell products that are contributing to the epidemic. In 2007 we spotlighted car companies and successfully urged hundreds of consumers to send e-mails to companies demanding cleaner cars rather than pinkwashed marketing promotions. More than 45,000 people visited thinkbeforeyoupink.org in October 2007. For six years this public education campaign has urged consumers to ask critical questions about the hundreds of pink ribbon products and promotions on the market each year during October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month. As a result, the conversation has changed dramatically, with more consumers and breast cancer groups asking the hard questions of pinkwashers and demanding change.

think before



you pink



Illustration by Jeremy Traum

Overcoming Inequities in Health Care

For all the great advances in breast cancer promised by news headlines, the reality is that the skyrocketing cost of cancer drugs has put them out of reach for many people. But an even broader problem is that without universal access to health care, even more people have little or no access to quality care. In addition to working to secure universal health care, BCA is working to change another conversation. We know that there are vast racial differences in breast cancer incidence and mortality. This is commonly attributed to differences in health care access, but it is also—possibly more so—linked with systemic injustices based on race, class, and the physical environments in which people live.

Working Toward Universal Health Care in California

Throughout 2007 BCA continued to support SB 840, the California Universal Healthcare Act, which would ensure that everyone in the state would have access to care under a new single-payer system. Ensuring that all women have access to breast cancer screening and treatment is crucial, and we educated our members, as well as state legislators, about the importance of SB 840 via e-alerts, information on our web site, and the *BCA Source*.



BCA also served on the executive committee of the Women's Working Group for Universal Health Care (WWG), which organizes women throughout California on universal health care and the special importance of this issue for women. In May 2007 BCA helped organize Women LEAD for Health, an advocacy day in Sacramento, which brought women's voices from throughout California to the health care reform debate at the state capitol. We also participated in the WWG Women's Health Summit in San Francisco.

In 2007 we reached out to and educated communities in the San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, the Los Angeles area, the Central Valley, and Monterey County with trainings in Spanish and English. Our presentations, forums, and trainings both informed and empowered women—particularly in communities of color—to make their voices heard in the health care reform movement and the legislative process. BCA partnered with Vision y Compromiso on several trainings for *promotoras* (community health leaders) on this topic.

Knowledge Is Power

PROVIDING CRUCIAL INFORMATION

In addition to our advocacy efforts, BCA's Information and Referral program is a crucial direct service, offering vital information to anyone who needs it. In 2007 we provided information, referrals, and assistance to more than a thousand people who contacted us via e-mail and our toll-free phone number. The people who reach out to us include women who are newly diagnosed—as well as their friends and family—looking for help with deciding what to do next. Our online and print packet for women newly diagnosed with the disease provides critical information and helpful tips. BCA reached thousands more people in 2007 by leading workshops and speaking at classes and events.

THE *BCA SOURCE* AND *SABER ES PODER*

Our bimonthly publication, the *BCA Source*, is widely recognized as one of the best in the breast cancer movement. The *Source* reached nearly 20,000 individuals, organizations, and medical offices in 2007. Articles in the *Source* included an analysis of a study that looked at the environmental and nongenetic links to breast cancer, lessons from clinical trials, discussion of the approval of silicone breast implants, analysis of news about red meat and breast cancer risk, a first-person account of how Think Before You Pink changed one young woman's way of thinking, and suggestions on how to move beyond the personal in environmental health.

BCA also publishes *Saber Es Poder* ("Knowledge Is Power"), a biannual newsletter in Spanish that focuses on issues of particular interest to Spanish-speaking communities. *Saber Es Poder*, which features original articles as well as adaptations from the *BCA Source*, is mailed to nearly 300 individuals and organizations. The issues in 2007 focused on the connection between hormones and breast cancer and environmental links to the disease, and included a guide to organic foods, a profile of a Latina-owned and operated housecleaning cooperative that uses safer products, and recipes for making safer cleaners at home.

MONTHLY E-ALERT

BCA's monthly e-alert continues to grow steadily, with a base of more than 8,000 online activists. Each e-alert contains the latest news and information about breast cancer, upcoming events of interest to our constituents, calls to take timely action on legislation and other issues, and links to make taking action easy.

WEB SITES

We have long-functioned as a significant online resource in the breast cancer world. In 2007 we redesigned and revamped our web site, www.bcaction.org. Our online information includes ways for people to stay informed and get involved.

Building the Future: BCA's Strategic Priorities

Throughout 2007 Breast Cancer Action's staff and board members contemplated the future of the breast cancer movement and our role in that future. This intensive year of reflection and examination has resulted in a five-year strategic plan that will guide and focus BCA's future work.

In developing this plan, BCA recommitted itself to its role as the watchdog of the breast cancer movement. We will continue to encourage our members to ask tough questions. And we will help them to understand the connections between what they can do personally and the social changes that are needed to end the breast cancer epidemic.



Our plan goes beyond the notion of “the Cure” and tackles the most pressing issues that must be addressed for true change to happen. By challenging assumptions and inspiring change, we are shaping the future of what happens in key aspects of breast cancer. Nearly 20 years ago, BCA initiated the conversation to address toxic exposures and environmental links to breast cancer. Researchers and some mainstream breast cancer groups are now dedicating time and money to understand those links. In more recent years, BCA began to question cause marketing for breast cancer, and now more organizations are urging people to “Think Before You Pink.” It's time to drive the conversation to new ground again. BCA is the organization best poised to make this happen by focusing on the as-yet-unresolved issues in breast cancer.

As a result of our visioning and strategic planning process, Breast Cancer Action has identified three priority areas on which to focus our work.



Advocate for more effective and less toxic breast cancer treatments by shifting the balance of power in the Food and Drug Administration's drug approval process away from the pharmaceutical industry and toward the public.

Our independence from pharmaceutical company funding puts us in a unique position in the breast cancer movement to advance this ambitious goal.



Decreasing involuntary environmental exposures that put people at risk for breast cancer.

While many breast cancer organizations offer advice on how individuals can reduce their voluntary exposures to toxins, the policy changes needed to eliminate these exposures for everyone require a broader social justice approach, which BCA has always provided and will now work to expand.

Creating awareness that it is not just genes, but social injustices—political, economic, and racial inequities—that lead to disparities in breast cancer outcomes.

Discussions on the social determinants of health are beginning to emerge in a number of health fields, but the cancer world still focuses on genes and differences in screening patterns. BCA has changed many conversations in breast cancer, and we will work to change this one as well to help people understand the social justice lens in which breast cancer needs to be seen and studied.



BCA's strategic priorities reflect both the organization's past and our commitment to a future that is made possible by the contributions of so many people. Our past accomplishments outlined in this report have been made possible by your steadfast support. The path we have charted for Breast Cancer Action will become a reality because you believe in our work and will strive with us to create that future. We are deeply grateful.

Acknowledgments

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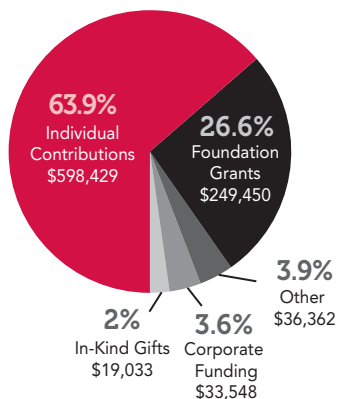
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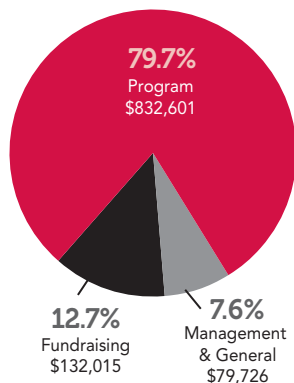
Revenue

Total: \$936,822



Expenses

Total: \$1,044,342



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