

**Waiting and Waiting for Mammogram Screenings:  
Study of Access to Basic, Life-Saving Care in New York City**



Presented by  
Congressman Anthony D. Weiner  
March 30, 2008

## **Introduction**

This year over 14,000 new breast cancer cases will be detected in women across New York State. Tragically, 3,000 women will die from it. Mammography has proven to be an effective means in detecting these cases early and in decreasing the risk of fatality, and can be especially effective in New York given our state has the second highest rate of breast cancer in the country. One in eight women in the United States will develop breast cancer in their lifetime.

The American Cancer Society recommends that women 40 and older have a mammogram every year. Early detection through mammograms can give women hope by significantly increasing their chance of survival from breast cancer. Over the last 7 years, due to better technology, the number of breast cancer cases that have been diagnosed has increased by 20 percent. However, the percentage of women receiving mammograms has been on the decline since 2000.

The root of this decline has been the alarming rate at which mammogram facilities are closing down. Among the reasons for these closures is the fact that mammography is not a lucrative business. Due to high overhead, inflation and rising medical costs, and the low rate paid by Medicare, offering mammograms can actually result in a net loss for the facilities that provide them. A 2007 report by Rep. Weiner found that 67 clinics had closed in New York City since 1999 – a 26 percent drop.

Medicare reimbursement rates for mammograms are well below the actual cost of performing the mammogram, causing some facilities to lose money just for giving the procedure. Private insurers base their reimbursement rates on Medicare levels, making this a concern for everyone in need of mammograms.

Brooklyn women can wait up to six months just to access basic, cancer-detecting mammograms, a new investigation from Representative Anthony Weiner (D – Brooklyn and Queens), a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, showed today. The investigation, a follow-up study on mammogram accessibility at 25 randomly-selected public and private health clinics, found that four screening facilities added a full month to their wait times – despite the fact that some breast cancers can more than double in size in that time.

## **Background**

Representative Weiner conducted a similar study in 2002, which showed that 55 facilities in New York City had stopped offering mammography screenings since 1999. The study also revealed that women had waited for an appointment an average of more than six weeks and, in some cases, as much as six months. That year, the national Medicare reimbursement rate set for a screening mammography was approximately \$80. Yet the average cost nationwide was \$104.

Staff worked with – and sincerely thanks – the following groups and individuals: The American College of Radiology; National Breast Cancer Coalition; Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation; American Cancer Society; Dr. Carol Lee of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Chairperson of the Breast Imaging Commission; and Dr. David Dershaw, Director of Breast Imaging at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

## 2008 Mammogram Wait Times

<b>Facility</b>	<b>2008 Wait Time</b>
<b>Queens</b>	<b>Avg. 4.2 weeks</b>
St. Johns Queens Hospital	1 week
Queens Hospital Center	6 weeks
Advanced Radiology Imaging	6 weeks
The Parkway Hospital	6 weeks
Mt. Sinai Hospital of Queens	2 weeks
<b>Brooklyn</b>	<b>Avg. 7.4 weeks</b>
Professional Radiology Services	24 weeks
Brookdale University Hospital	5 weeks
Wyckoff Heights Medical Center	7 weeks
Interfaith Medical Center	1 week
Doshi Diagnostic	1 day
<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Avg. 5.5 weeks</b>
Weiler Hospital	2 days
Bronx Lebanon Hospital	18 weeks
University Diagnostic Imaging	4 weeks
North Central Bronx Hospital	1 week
Montefiore Medical Park	4 weeks
<b>Manhattan</b>	<b>Avg. 3.7 weeks</b>
Beth Israel Medical Center	3.5 weeks
West Side Radiology	7 weeks
Cornell Medical Imaging	5 weeks
Breast Examination of Harlem	2 weeks
Manhattan Diagnostic Radiology	1 week
<b>Staten Island</b>	<b>Avg. 4.2 weeks</b>
Staten Island University Hospital	14 weeks
Richmond Radiology	1 day
Staten Island Medical Group (Annondale)	1 week
Regional Radiology	4 weeks
Staten Island Medical Group (Clove Rd)	2 weeks

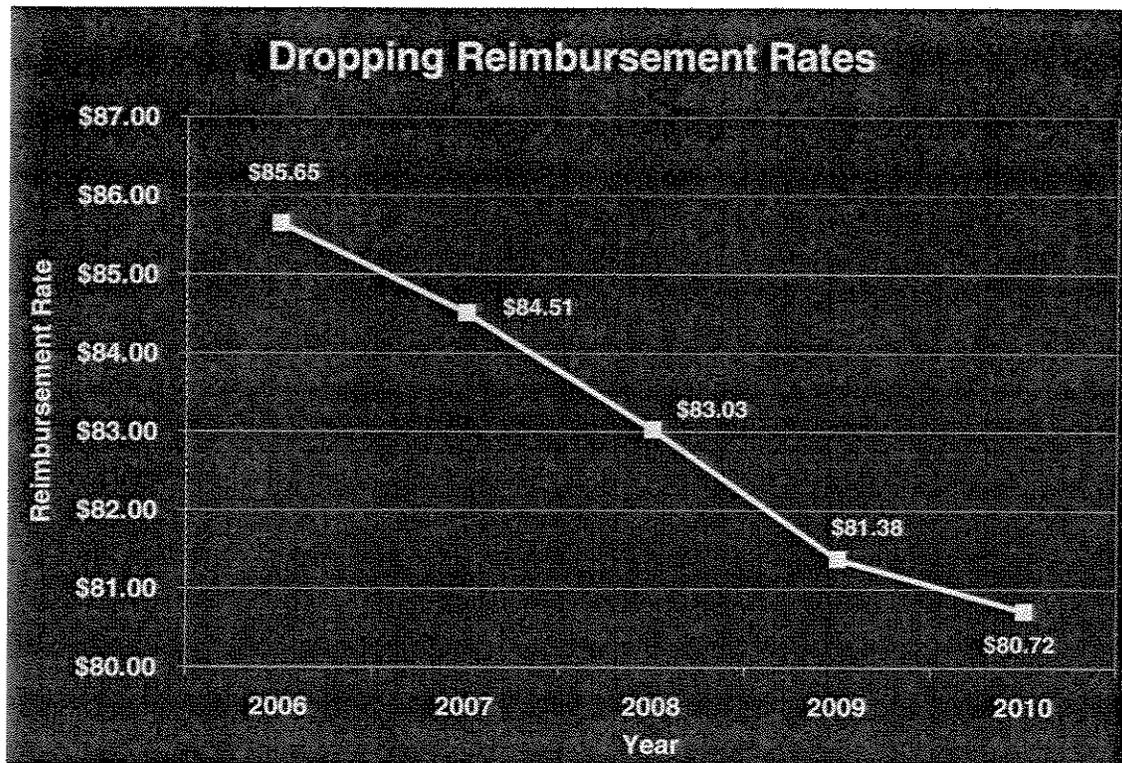
*Source: Telephone Survey Conducted by the Office of Rep. Anthony D. Weiner, March 2008*

### Methodology

Twenty-five mammogram facilities were chosen at random from Affinity Health Plan, a public database of clinics and hospitals in New York City. Staffers from the office of Representative Weiner called the facilities and followed a script that asked what the earliest appointment possible was for a mammogram and if that wait time was average. Staffers did not reveal they were calling from a Congressional Office. The methodology used in the updated study of February 2008 is consistent with the methodology used in the original study of July 2007.

## Solution to the Mammogram Problem

While the current nationwide average for a mammogram screening is between \$100 and \$125, the average reimbursement rate is only about \$83 – leaving health centers to cover a twenty dollar gap on average. Making matters worse, in 2006, Medicare made a 4-year cut announcement. Since then, the average reimbursement rate cut has been 2.5 percent, or about \$1.31, each year. Projections place 2010 rates at \$80.72.



**Reimbursement Rates in New York City and Surrounding Areas in 2008**

	Manhattan	Queens	NYC Suburbs	NY State	US
Film Screening	\$101.97	\$98.43	\$101.90	\$76.71	\$83.35
Digital Screening	\$167.77	\$160.99	\$167.04	\$123.31	\$134.52

*Source: American College of Radiology, 2008*

To help reduce long wait times, Representative Weiner introduced legislation in 2001 – and helped pass into law in 2003 – to increase Medicare reimbursement rates. Private plans use these reimbursement rates as a baseline for their negotiations with employers, therefore, increased Medicare reimbursement has an impact throughout the insurance market.

Rep. Weiner plans to introduce new legislation this week to increase reimbursement rates 15 percent in 2009 – \$95 per screening – and index the rate in later years. The step will help financially-burdened health clinics, who are currently losing money performing mammograms, and stay in the field to maintain an adequate workforce supply that can screen patients.