



In honor of Giving Tuesday this year, WCMS is placing a special focus on the **Western North Carolina Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative (WNC-CRCSI)**. For those unfamiliar with the program, the WNC-CRCSI provides community outreach, education, and FIT (fecal immunochemical test) based colorectal cancer screening to uninsured individuals between the ages of 45-75 in Buncombe, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Yancey, Henderson, Transylvania, Rutherford, and Polk Counties. Patients with a positive FIT result receive screening colonoscopy with no out-of-pocket costs. The WNC-CRCSI is a collaboration between Project Access® (WCMS), Digestive Health Partners (a private practice), and local federally qualified health centers (FQHCs).

**Why is there a specific initiative for colorectal cancer in WNC?** Colorectal cancer is preventable and treatable with regular screening, yet it remains common with an estimated **4,740 new cases and 1,640 deaths in North Carolina for 2023**. Preventative screenings have been shown to decrease both the incidence and mortality, however, screening rates are lowest among uninsured and low-household-income residents. This means that uninsured and low-income individuals may develop colorectal cancer that could have been detected earlier or avoided altogether. Thanks to the creation of the WNC-CRCSI in 2016, **over 3000 uninsured residents of Western North Carolina have received screening** they may not have otherwise been able to access. These screenings have resulted in cancers prevented, through the removal of precancerous polyps, and lives saved with early detection of curable cancers.

Colorectal cancer can be difficult to talk about. **The WNC-CRCSI raises awareness about the prevalence of colorectal cancer through outreach and education for community members of all ages to review the risk factors, signs and symptoms, and screening recommendations for colorectal cancer.** CRCSI brings colorectal cancer to the forefront of community health conversations by educating and sharing information with the larger Western North Carolina community. Through educating and sharing information, the WNC-CRCSI starts difficult conversations and connects more WNC residents with colorectal cancer care.

The WNC-CRCSI provides care and support beyond preventative screenings and community education. The CRCSI provides colonoscopies with no out-of-pocket costs and low or no-cost surgery and cancer care. Furthermore, **the WNC-CRCSI addresses barriers and financial concerns of uninsured patients that do not qualify for Project Access®, to create more pathways to colorectal cancer screening.** Building pathways to care includes providing gasoline voucher cards to help patients with transportation expenses and covering language interpreter fees as necessary.

**This Giving Tuesday, consider supporting the ongoing and expanding work of the Western North Carolina Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative.** In 2024, the WNC-CRCSI plans to expand to counties further west in our region, as many of these county's report some of the highest colorectal cancer rates in North Carolina. We are continually growing our referring clinic network and expanding our counties served. The goal of the WNC-CRCSI is to screen 80% of the uninsured population between the ages of 45 and 75 in our service area for colorectal cancer, thereby finding cancer earlier, improving health outcomes, and reducing health disparities in our community. **Join WCMS in caring for our WNC community through donating to the Western North Carolina Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative—a collaborative and multidimensional community care initiative.**

**Make a Difference this Giving Tuesday:** <https://tinyurl.com/wcms-givingtuesday>

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