

Karen Miller and Laura Weinberg – Bringing Breast Cancer Education to Underserved Groups

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Breast cancer advocates, Karen Miller and Laura Weinberg.

For more than 20 years, breast cancer advocates Karen Miller and Laura Weinberg have worked with communities on Long Island, New York and surrounding areas. Together, they facilitate breast cancer education and prevention efforts among diverse groups of women, including those who are underserved.

Miller and Weinberg collaborate as community partners with NIEHS-funded researchers at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Miller and Weinberg's expertise and years of experience with community groups and in disseminating information on breast cancer prevention to women have been essential in translating Mount Sinai research into meaningful information for communities.

Although motivated by differing experiences with breast cancer, Miller and Weinberg have a shared interest in breast cancer education and risk reduction, with a focus on environmental factors.

Miller's breast cancer diagnosis in 1987 motivated her to gain a better understanding of the environmental causes of the disease and to begin educating other women. "I wanted to learn about the other causative factors of breast cancer, aside from familial risk," she explains. In 1992, she founded the [Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, Inc. \(HBCAC\)](#), a nonprofit, grassroots community organization dedicated to the eradication of breast cancer through education, awareness, and policy change.

Weinberg says that she was motivated to explore the causes of breast cancer after she noticed an alarming increase of breast cancer incidence within her Long Island neighborhood in the early 1990s. Through her own research and networking, she learned about studies exploring associations between breast cancer and environmental chemicals. Weinberg became president of the [Great Neck](#)

[Breast Cancer Coalition](#) (GNBCC) in 2001, where she started reaching out to other advocacy and environmental breast cancer groups on Long Island, including the HBCAC.

Early in their partnership, Miller and Weinberg participated in the [Long Island Breast Cancer Study](#) (LIBCSP) by assisting researchers with a questionnaire, conducting community forums to gain attention for the project, and mapping breast cancer incidence on Long Island. This 10-year project started in 1993 and was funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and NIEHS. LIBCSP studies resulted in a number of [publications](#).

In 2010, Miller and Weinberg joined Mount Sinai's Susan Teitelbaum, Ph.D., and Jia Chen, Sc.D., to represent the community perspective on a project studying whether environmental endocrine disrupting chemicals act during specific developmental windows and whether they exert effects independently or synergistically in breast tissue. This research was part of the Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Program (BCERP), which is funded by NIEHS and NCI. Miller and Weinberg made presentations on breast cancer and the environment, as well as advocacy, to a multitude of groups on Long Island and in Cincinnati.



In a recent collaboration, Weinberg and Miller worked with women from the Witness Project of Harlem to prepare them to educate underserved groups about breast cancer and the environment.

More recently, Miller and Weinberg collaborated with Mount Sinai's Barbara Brenner, Dr.P.H., to develop and implement Advocates Mentoring Advocates, a training program designed to prepare women from the [Witness Project of Harlem](#) to educate underserved groups about breast cancer and the environment. The Witness Project is a faith-based program focused on breast and cervical cancer education, primarily for African-American women.

Thanks to BCERP Opportunity Funds, Miller and Weinberg were able to mentor and deliver training to the Witness Project of Harlem team using interactive workshops on topics such as exposures to personal care and household products and the associated breast cancer risks. After the training, the Witness Project women created their own presentations on breast cancer and the environment and disseminated this information in their communities. The training workshops were also pulled together into a [toolkit](#) that others can use.

The BCERP program has made important contributions to understanding risks for breast cancer. However, the involvement of community partners like Miller and Weinberg has ensured that the findings of research are appropriately translated and shared with affected people. In addition, their advocacy, based on the BCERP research findings, is leading to positive policy changes that may protect individuals from exposure to environmental factors that heighten breast cancer risk. They have truly been "community partners" in research.

Highlighted Publications

- Brenner B, Evans S, **Miller K, Weinberg L**, Rothenberg A, Martinez C, Jandorf L. 2015. Breast cancer and the environment: reaching multicultural communities; Advocates Mentoring Advocates. Environmental Justice 8(4):117-125.[[Abstract](#)]
- Teitelbaum S, Chen J, **Miller KJ, Weinberg L**. 2013. Breast cancer risk: timing and environmental exposures. Cancer inCYTES Magazine 2:2.[[Full Text](#)]
- Osuch JR, Silk K, Price C, Barlow J, **Miller K**, Hernick A, Fonfa A. 2012. A historical perspective on breast cancer activism in the United States: from education and support to partnership in scientific research. J Womens Health (Larchmt) 21(3):355-362.[[Abstract](#)]
- **Miller KJ**. 2013. Prevention is the cure. Cancer inCYTES Magazine 2:1.[[Full Text](#)]