

Abstract

Aims of the study

To assess factors potentially influencing participation in existing breast cancer screening (BCS) programs in Europe and Switzerland as a basis for implementing a new cantonal BCS program in Switzerland.

Methods

We conducted a multi-step qualitative study. First, we investigated European BCS programs using literature searches and semi-structured interviews with experts of three BCS programs. Based on the results of the first step, we adapted the interview guide for the three Swiss BCS programs, in particular with respect to factors perceived to have positive influence on participation. Interview data were thematically analyzed in relation to the organizational steps of a BCS program. The perceived factors influencing the participation rate were elaborated and their transferability to Switzerland was discussed with the Swiss experts.

Results

We conducted eleven interviews with experts of three European and three Swiss BCS programs. Despite the differences in the program organization of the European and Swiss programs, the following factors were perceived as important for a good participation rate: Information on BCS, invitation system, short distance to screening units, organization of BCS separate from healthcare, good collaboration with physicians and involved institutions, quality control, low cost for the women, women's satisfaction and long program experience. Invitation letters with fixed appointments, mobile screening units, organization of further diagnostics by the program and covering the cost of further examination was deemed transferable by some of the Swiss experts.

Conclusions

Two organizational factors that new Swiss BCS programs could consider mainly from established European BCS programs are, first, sending invitations with a fixed appointment and, second, organizing the further assessment after an abnormal finding in the screening mammography by the program. Whether these measures lead to an increase in participation rate in Switzerland needs careful evaluation.