

Tackling the Top-Five: Prostate-specific Antigen (PSA) Screenings for Men 75 and Older

WHAT



The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test should almost never be performed for men over 75. The blood level of PSA is often elevated in men with prostate cancer, although a number of benign conditions can also cause a man's PSA level to rise.

WHY

- Over-diagnosis of prostate cancer through PSA screenings is associated with serious harm: **unnecessary biopsies, surgeries, and radiation therapy (all of which come with their own risks) greatly outweigh the benefits in asymptomatic older men.**
- The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issues a “D” rating for PSA-based screening in men 70 years of age and older.
- In addition to harm, PSA screenings can lead to high costs from the screening and resulting treatment.

BURDEN

- Despite the USPSTF “D” rating, Medicare (and many private plans) still covers the test, and more than one million Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries age 75 and older received a PSA test in 2014, at a cost of at least \$44 million.
- The cost estimates do not factor the harm, opportunity cost, and out of pocket expenses related to the unnecessary biopsy, surveillance, and treatment that could often follow PSA tests.

How to measure and model language:

- [Specifications for claims-based analyses](#) to measure wasteful utilization and spending in-house, based on previous studies to measure Top Five.
- [The Milliman MedInsight Health Waste Calculator](#)
- [RFI language to discuss low-value care with your TPA or carrier.](#)

Clinical Evidence and Guidelines

- [Annals of Internal Medicine](#)
- [American Academy of Family Physicians](#)
- [USPSTF Recommendation](#)
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Reading list:

- [MedPAC databook list of LVC includes PSA screenings](#)
- [Mayo Clinic Pros and Cons of PSA tests](#)
- [Choosing Wisely Patient information](#)
- [American Urological Association statement on USPSTF rating](#)

Counter-points: it intuitive to think that screening for cancer is a positive thing. However, this does not mean the test is good. Most men with high PSAs don't have prostate cancer and men over 75 are likely to have elevated PSA levels without any risk of symptoms or death. Men with certain risk factors (*e.g.*, family history) should see a doctor before age 50 (see Choosing Wisely patient information for more).