

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 28, 2025

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Free Colorectal Cancer Screenings Available for Abilene and Surrounding Communities through ACTION for Big Country

Excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer (CRC) is the third most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. The rate of people being diagnosed with colon or rectal cancer has dropped overall since the mid-1980s, mainly because more people are getting screened and changing their lifestyle-related risk factors. Yet, too often, financial concerns prevent individuals from accessing these important services.

For Abilene, Texas, residents and the surrounding communities, resources are now available to ensure cost is not a barrier to receiving screenings through ACTION (Against Colorectal Cancer Together in Our Neighborhoods) for Big Country.

The program addresses the shortage of colorectal cancer screenings in the Abilene area by providing CRC education, fecal immunochemical test (FIT) screenings and colonoscopy services to uninsured or underinsured individuals.

ACTION for Big Country is made possible through a Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) PP20030 grant. Because the Big Country area around Abilene has low rates of CRC screening, Julie St. John, DrPH, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) associate professor in the School of Health Professions, received this funding to provide these resources to uninsured or underinsured people in Abilene and several surrounding counties.

CRC is one of two cancers that can be prevented through regular screening and by the removal of precancerous polyps during colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy screening.

Linda Neill, TTUHSC program manager for ACTION for Big Country, said participants will be provided a free take-home colorectal screening kit, called a Fit Kit.

“We provide the kits to people between the ages of 45 and 75 who are either uninsured or underinsured,” Neill said. “If their insurance doesn’t cover the screening, they qualify.”

There is no income limit. A screening kit is provided to take home, complete the test and return it by mail. Once results are received, we notify them promptly.”

A positive result, which indicates the possible presence of blood in the stool, requires follow-up with a colonoscopy. ACTION for Big Country partners with Hendrick Health to provide these procedures, which are fully funded through the CPRIT grant.

“We also collaborate with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) such as the Abilene Community Health Clinic and the Presbyterian Medical Mission Clinic, where patients may see a physician and obtain a kit,” Neill said. “We can also conduct eligibility assessments by phone. For individuals considered higher risk—for example, those with an immediate family member with a history of colorectal cancer—we can mail a kit directly to their home or provide one during their visit.”

For more information about ACTION for Big Country, contact Neill at (325) 696-0673.