

## The Topic Is Cancer

# A Big Anniversary for Screen for Life!

Posted on Monday, March 4, 2019 by DCPC

By Cynthia A. Gelb

A lot can happen in 20 years. Children grow up and leave the nest. You mark professional and personal milestones. You get older, and hopefully wiser. You plan for more time with family, travel, more fun and less stress. You sock away savings for retirement. But health—that's what's really important, because—as my grandmother used to say—"Without your health, you have nothing."

For 20 years, CDC's *Screen for Life: National Colorectal Cancer Action Campaign* (SFL) has worked hard to improve the health of millions of Americans by informing them of the benefits of screening for colorectal cancer (CRC).

## In the Beginning...

In 1997, CDC began planning and research to develop a national campaign to increase CRC screening. Around that time, screening rates were well below 40%. Soon after, Medicare began covering CRC screening.

Clearly, we needed to do something to inform people that screening helps prevent this cancer and encourage them to get tested. That something was the *Screen for Life: National Colorectal Cancer Action Campaign* (SFL), which CDC launched in 1999. It was a pioneering initiative to break the taboo of silence about the cancer that no one wanted to think about, much less discuss. In fact, the messages around CRC in the earliest SFL public service announcements and print materials centered on a "Let's Break the Silence" theme.

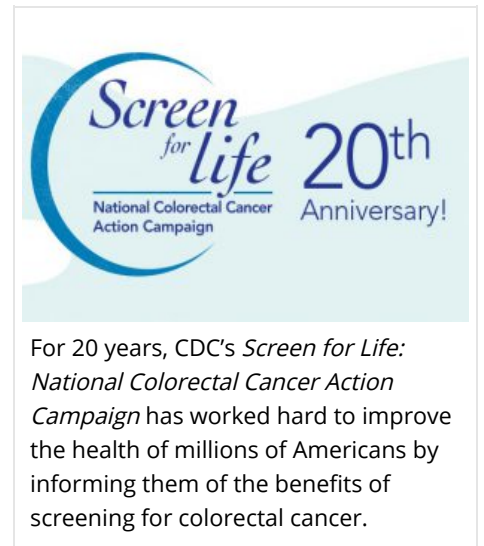
Today, SFL messages revolve around screening test choices (yes, there are options), and myth-busting about common excuses people use to avoid getting tested. We work closely with our program partners in health departments in states and tribes and the District of Columbia to support their efforts and provide tailored and localizable materials.

## We're Aiming Higher

SFL, with our partners at the Entertainment Industry Foundation and the National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance, has enlisted many A-list stars to spread the message over the years. From Katie Couric to Morgan Freeman, Diane Keaton, Jimmy Smits, Terrence Howard, and Meryl Streep—each has volunteered his or her time to help us reach more people with our "Screening Saves Lives" messages.

Since launching 20 years ago, SFL has generated more than:

- 14.6 billion audience impressions (the number of times PSAs and ads are seen or heard).



- \$241 million in donated ad value.
- Over 3.5 million visits to CDC's SFL and related CRC web pages.

Even more important than those numbers are increases in screening since the start of SFL. Since CDC launched SFL, many organizations and partners have joined the mission to increase CRC screening. Still, our work is far from over. In 2000, just 34% of Americans aged 50 and older were screened for CRC. The latest surveys show that about 62% of Americans aged 50–75 reported being screened according to national guidelines. We're aiming higher.

At CDC, aiming higher means that in addition to conducting SFL activities, CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control is heavily involved in CRC screening initiatives. The agency supports grantees and other program partners to help increase screening through its [National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program](#) and [Colorectal Cancer Control Program](#).

## It's Personal

Anyone who knows me knows this is personal for me. As the daughter of a colon cancer survivor, I know the importance of screening. I've been screened several times, with polyps found and removed almost every time.

My friends tease me about broaching the subject of CRC screening with anyone 50 and older. These days, there's no silence to be broken. We've done that. There's no room to be quiet or shy about encouraging others to remain healthy through CRC screening. Each of us can do that small thing. This March, during National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and throughout the year, I urge you to talk to your friends, family, and coworkers.

I am proud to lead the *Screen for Life* campaign and of the progress we've seen through the 20 years it has existed, grown, and thrived. Happy Anniversary, *Screen for Life!* One day soon, I hope this campaign and others like it can fade away, as CRC screening becomes the norm for everyone. As we say, "No more excuses, folks!" Screening really does save lives.

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Categories [Colorectal \(Colon\) Cancer](#)

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