

# First lady seeks breast cancer study volunteers

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**F**irst Lady Luisa Gándara called Wednesday on all women who have had a sister, living or deceased, diagnosed with breast cancer, to sign up for a new 10-year breast cancer study being conducted by the federal government.

"Invasive breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosis among women in the country. The [breast] cancer rate for Puerto Rico is a little alarming," she said.

Citing data from the Health Department's Cancer Registry, Gándara said that for the past five years, an estimated 1,500 new breast cancer cases are diagnosed on the island every year, double the number of cases from 20 years ago.

According to the American Cancer Society, one in every 18 women is diagnosed with breast cancer in Puerto Rico.

Gándara said raising breast cancer awareness is especially important to her because her mother and oldest sister died from the disease. As such, she signed up for the breast cancer study Wednesday, during an activity at La Fortaleza.

The research piece, officially dubbed the "Sister Study," is being conducted by the federal National Sciences Institute of Environmental Health, based in Durham, N.C., and its aim is to



STAR PHOTO BY CARLOS ANGUIITA

**First Lady Luisa Gándara, right, and "Sister Study" Coordinator for the Latino community Mary Quezada, left,** promote local participation in a new 10-year breast cancer study being conducted by the federal government on Wednesday.

changes.

For more information on participating in the Sister Study, call 1-877-474-7837.

monitor the environmental and genetic factors in breast cancer cases, said Mary Quezada, the study's coordinator for the Latino community.

To be eligible for participation in the study, a woman must have a biological sister, living or deceased, who has been diagnosed with breast cancer; be between the ages of 35 and 74; and not been diagnosed herself with the disease.

Quezada said the study is focusing on sisters because "they share everything," from growing up in the same household, sharing clothes and makeup, meals and other lifestyle habits. Quezada also said women who have had a sister diagnosed with breast cancer have a 50 percent higher chance of being diagnosed with the disease in comparison to other women.

"We hope 50,000 women [in the United States and Puerto Rico] will participate in the study," Quezada said. "We will track participants for 10 years ... but we should have the first preliminary data in five years."

Once a participant signs up, she will receive a study kit in the mail containing four questionnaires to fill out. A nurse will then conduct two phone interviews and a home visit with the participant, collect a blood sample, toenail clippings and household dust. Thereafter researchers will contact the participant once a year, to verify her health status and any possible lifestyle