

23 February 2024



## **Breast cancer cannot wait: Open letter regarding inadequate access to diagnostic imaging in Tasmania for breast cancer**

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) remains deeply concerned about the lack of access to diagnostic imaging in the public system in the south of Tasmania and calls on all candidates contesting the 2024 state election to make commitments to fix this issue and restore basic rights to healthcare for Tasmanian women.

Since 2018, BCNA has been aware of significant and consequential delays in diagnosing symptomatic women with breast cancer due to the lack of a public imaging service that GPs can refer their patients to at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH). This service is vital in ensuring the timely diagnosis of women who present with symptoms and differs from BreastScreen Tasmania which is for the population screening of asymptomatic women.

BCNA has been working with both the Tasmanian and Federal governments to advocate for improvements in access to diagnostic imaging in the public health system for six years. Despite some progress towards a long-term solution, the problem persists today. BCNA continues to hear worrying stories of delayed diagnoses, women being forced to travel interstate for diagnosis, and even presenting to emergency departments with symptoms of breast cancer.

**Any delay to a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment risks the cancer progressing, resulting in much poorer survival outcomes and cancer that is harder to treat. This lack of access today means that Tasmanian women do not have access quality and timely healthcare. The impact of this could mean the difference between treatable cancer vs incurable metastatic breast cancer.**

BCNA reminds the Tasmanian and Federal governments that they are committed to uphold the rights of women to achieve the highest attainable standard of health.<sup>i</sup> Additionally, the Australian Optimal Care Pathway for people with breast cancer states that a patient with signs and symptoms that may suggest breast cancer should have diagnostic tests conducted within two weeks.<sup>ii</sup>

BCNA is calling on all candidates in the state election to make immediate commitments towards immediate solutions to ensure that all women in Tasmania can access diagnostic imaging for breast cancer without incurring out-of-pocket expenses or travelling significant distances.

### **Our call to action includes:**

- Emergency up-front travel subsidies for women who must travel to access diagnostic imaging elsewhere, and partnerships with other state governments to assist with the diagnostic imaging burden.
- Formal public-private partnerships to see private clinics conduct screening under bulk-billing conditions.
- Implementation of temporary and/or remote workforce and facilities to bolster imaging capacity at the RHH whilst a longer-term service is established.

BCNA staff will be in Hobart on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February to speak with consumers affected by this issue, politicians, and other decision makers about this priority issue

and to ensure basic rights to healthcare are restored as soon as possible for all Tasmanian women.

Yours sincerely,



Kirsten Pilatti  
Chief Executive Officer



Vicki Durston  
Director Policy, Advocacy & Support Services

**Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA)** is Australia's leading breast cancer consumer organisation. BCNA provides information and support to those diagnosed and their supporters, opportunities to connect with others going through a similar situation and work to influence a stronger healthcare system to ensure all Australians affected by breast cancer receive the very best care, treatment, and support.

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<sup>i</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, opened for signature 16 December 1966, 993 UNTS 3 (entered into force 3 January 1976) art 12 ('ICESCR')

<sup>ii</sup> Optimal care pathway for people with breast cancer, 2nd edn, June 2021, Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne.  
<https://www.cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/breast-cancer-optimal-cancer-care-pathway>