

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

## ON AUSTRALIA'S PATH OF PROGRESS TOWARDS ZERO DEATHS FROM BREAST CANCER



### CEO FOREWORD

Since its inception in 1994, the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) has invested \$190M in game-changing research, unlocking a further \$650M through partnerships and collaborations. This investment has helped increase the Australian breast cancer survival rate from 76% to 91.5% over the past 27 years.

In early 2020, the world was changed irreversibly by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As outlined in **NBCF's 2030 Report Card**, published one year later in March 2021, COVID-19 created significant challenges for a broad range of research areas, including breast cancer. In a survey comprising Australia's leading breast cancer researchers, nine in 10 respondents anticipated their research program would take over 12 months to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Today, with the start of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, NBCF publishes an update on the impact of COVID-19 on Australia's path of progress towards Zero Deaths from breast cancer. The update has a particular focus on the impact to Australian women who will develop and be treated for breast cancer in the coming years, and the critical additional research funding required to give them the best chance of survival.

Breast cancer does not wait for COVID-19 to end. Now is the time to re-focus on reaching Zero Deaths.



Professor Sarah Hosking,  
CEO NBCF

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Hosking'.

Professor Sarah Hosking  
CEO, National Breast Cancer Foundation



# HOW COVID-19 WILL CHANGE THE FACE OF BREAST CANCER IN AUSTRALIA OVER THE COMING YEARS

The National Breast Cancer Foundation is marking the start of Breast Cancer Awareness Month by forewarning of the potential increase in more advanced breast cancers in the coming years, with COVID-19 causing sharp delays and declines in breast screening, breast care appointments and surgeries.

Time is critical when detecting, diagnosing and treating breast cancer, and can have a significant impact on treatment options and survival outcomes.



During the 2020 lockdowns roughly **98% of breast screening appointments were cancelled or delayed**<sup>1</sup> and in August 2021 there was a total close of BreastScreen NSW.

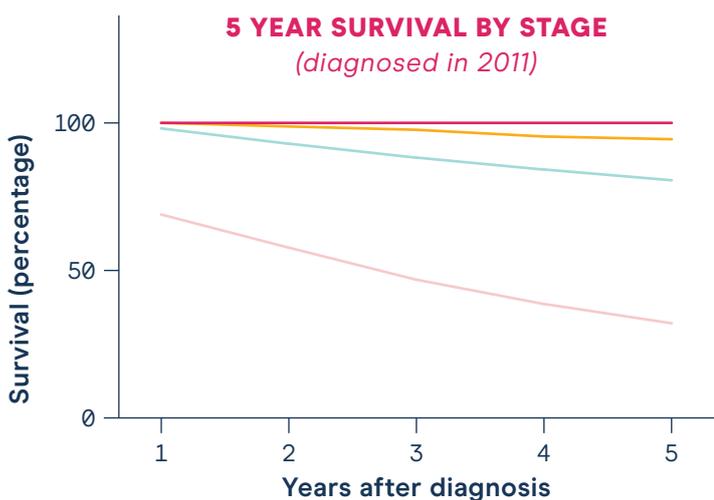


There's been a **10–30% drop in diagnostic and investigational surgeries** including biopsies, mastectomies and lumpectomies in the first wave of COVID-19<sup>2</sup>. It is not yet known what the impact of the Delta strain will have this year but, given the trend, we may expect to see more advanced cancers detected and potential for increasing mortality.



A surgical delay of 12 weeks could result in **500 more deaths per year**<sup>3</sup>.

There has been positive progress to the overall breast cancer survival rate, which has increased from 76% in 1994 to 91.5% in 2021, and continues to rise thanks largely to research. Despite this, a greater investment needs to be made across the research spectrum which can help increase the survival rates of later stage and hard-to-treat breast cancer, which currently lags behind.



Currently, the later a person is diagnosed with breast cancer, the worse their five-year survival outcome is:

- Stage 1 (early breast cancer) – 100%
- Stage 2 (early breast cancer – may have spread to lymph nodes) – 94.6%
- Stage 3 (locally advanced breast cancer) – 80.2%
- Stage 4 (metastatic) – 32%

This means research into hard-to-treat and more advanced breast cancers has become even more crucial to future-proof solutions for women with more advanced diagnoses over the coming years.



NBCF has funded vital life-saving research into breast cancer since 1994, and the data shows that **over 50,000 people** with breast cancer have survived to the five-year milestone during this time. However, without continued investment in research, **over 30,000 Australian lives** will be lost to breast cancer by 2030.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Cancer screening and COVID-19 in Australia* December 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cancer Australia, *National and jurisdictional data on the impact of COVID-19 on medical services and procedures in Australia: Breast, colorectal, lung, prostate and skin cancers*, December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Radiation Therapy Advisory Group, *COVID's impact on breast cancer in Australia*, August 2021.



# PLANNING FOR BREAST CANCER RESEARCH IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

With breast cancer incidence increasing, NBCF will require an investment of at least \$150 million over the next 10 years to help stop deaths from breast cancer.

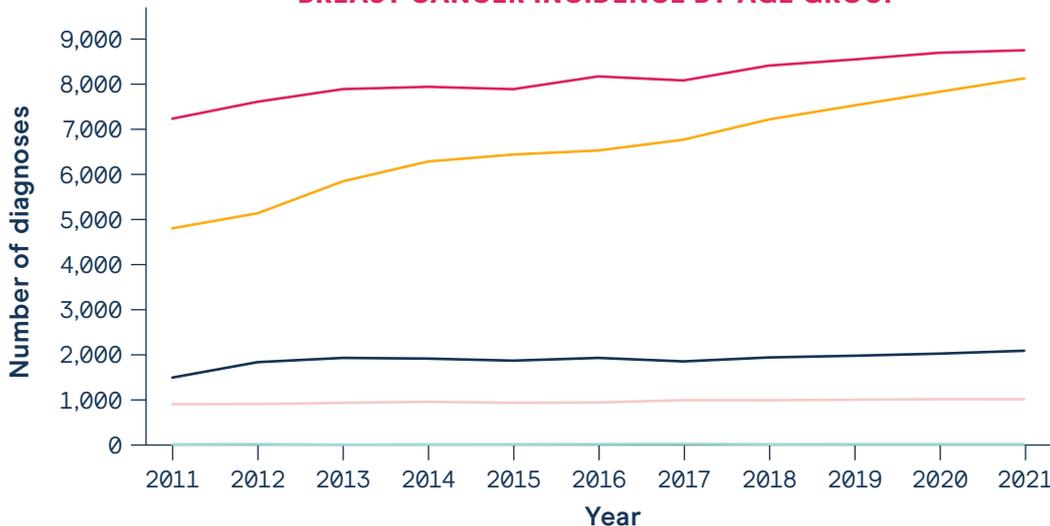


Over **230,000** women and men are living with breast cancer in Australia and new data shows incidence is increasing across all age groups, and is continuing to outpace population growth in Australia.



Australia's population has **grown 15% over the past 10 years** compared to the increase in new breast cancer cases, which has **increased 36% in the same period**.

## BREAST CANCER INCIDENCE BY AGE GROUP



New data shows **incidence increasing across all age groups:**

- 00–24 years
- 25–44 years
- 45–64 years
- 65–84 years
- 85+ years

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Cancer Data in Australia June 2021)

NBCF has identified a range of research areas which need to be addressed, particularly for more advanced breast cancers, if Australia is to reach Zero Deaths – some of which it has already started funding, including:

### PREVENTION



**NBCF's Prevention Program** announced in 2021 launched with investment into a 10-Year Chair in Breast Cancer Prevention.

### NEW AND IMPROVED TREATMENT



**Immunotherapies** are an emerging area of research that aims to enhance the immune system to kill cancer cells in the body.



**Precision medicine** is evolving towards more personalised therapies.

The significant results generated by NBCF-funded research can then be used to leverage additional funding from NBCF or other funding sources to continue their important work.



On average, **every dollar invested in NBCF projects unlocks \$3.40 in total funding**. This means each donation to NBCF-funded research is making a bigger impact.