

**Breast and cervical
cancer screening
in Australia
1996–1997**

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Breast and cervical cancer screening in Australia 1996–1997

**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare,
BreastScreen Australia and
the National Cervical Screening Program**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

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Symbols used in the tables

n.a. not available

Notes

Rates are expressed per 100,000 women and age standardised to both the Australian 1991 population (A) and the World Standard Population (W). Tables for these populations are in Appendix C.

Preface

This publication is the first national breast and cervical cancer screening report. It is a joint project between the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, BreastScreen Australia and the National Cervical Screening Program. The report is in concordance with the National Health Information Development Plan and has been funded under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Public Health Division of the Department of Health and Aged Care.

The project has been carried out under the guidance of the National Screening Information Advisory Group, which has had carriage of the new set of breast and cervical national indicators reported on in this publication. As part of the spirit of cooperation between agencies the Institute has endeavoured to involve State and Territory breast and cervical cancer screening programs in all steps of the report production. The task of bringing data together and reporting on the indicators has been made easier by the generous level of support given by State and Territory screening program and data managers and other interested experts in the field.

It is envisaged that the next steps in this project will be to develop a set of triennial breast and cervical cancer screening measures, and to access a broader range of data.

This publication will add significantly to the information available on cancer screening in Australia.

Richard Madden
Director

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Summary

- This report is the first to present national data on breast and cervical cancer screening in Australia. The report presents data on a new set of indicators for the cancer screening programs – BreastScreen Australia and the National Cervical Cancer Screening Program.

Breast cancer screening

- Breast cancer is a significant public health issue (9,846 new cases in 1996), and given current knowledge is not preventable. Therefore the greatest impact on mortality rates can be achieved through the early detection of breast cancers with mammography, and follow-up treatment.
- 1,262,584 women were screened by BreastScreen Australia in 1996–1997 with 52.2% of women aged 50–69 years (the target population) screened in the recommended 24-month period.
- It is important that breast cancers are detected early (i.e. ≤ 10 mm in size) to improve health outcomes. Small cancers comprised 37% of all invasive cancers detected in the target age group. The small cancer detection rate, 14.4 cancers per 10,000 women screened, is in excess of the program's target of 8 per 10,000 women screened.
- Breast cancer incidence rates for the target age group increased steadily between 1983 and 1991, increased rapidly to a peak in 1995 (287 new cases per 100,000) and have shown a small decrease in 1996. This rapid increase was in part a response due to the screening program and its ability to detect cancers that would otherwise not have been detected until a later date.
- The mortality rate for women in the target group declined by 9.4% between 1993 and 1996 to 63 deaths per 100,000 women.

Cervical cancer screening

- Cervical cancer (947 new cases in 1995) is one of the few cancers where screening detects pre-cancerous lesions, thereby rendering a large proportion of these cancers preventable.
- 2,619,273 women were screened by the National Cervical Screening Program in 1996–1997 with 62.4% of the target group (women aged 20–69 years) screened in the recommended 24-month period.
- Sixty-four per cent of women who had a negative Pap smear did not have a further smear in the following 24 months, indicating that in general women are not seeking rescreening inside the recommended 2-yearly screening interval.
- The detection rate for high-grade abnormalities was much higher in younger age groups.
- Incidence rates for micro-invasive cervical cancer (early stage cancer) for the target age group have increased markedly between 1982 (1.6 per 100,000 women) and 1995 (3.1 per 100,000 women). This is a positive result given that the increase is mainly at the expense of later stage cancers in a period where the incidence rate for all cervical cancers is declining. Incidence rates for squamous cell carcinoma of the cervix (the most preventable type) fell by 36% for the target age group between 1983 and 1995.
- The mortality rates for women in the target age group declined from 5.2 per 100,000 women in 1983, to 3 per 100,000 women in 1996.