

AUSTRALIANS URGED TO GET 'HANDS ON' FOR BREAST CANCER SELF-EXAM

- Only one in four women check their breasts monthly
- Nearly 50% of women admit to having no idea what to look or feel for
 - 44% have never visited a doctor for a breast check

Sydney, 29 September, 2016 – New research by HCF, released ahead of Breast Cancer Awareness Month reveals only **one in four women** are checking their breasts monthly with **44%** having never visited the doctor for a breast check. While 92% of Australian women understand the importance of regular breast checks, almost 50% of women don't know what to look (**44%**) or feel (**42%**) for, and the majority are using self-taught examination methods.ⁱ

HCF, leading not-for-profit health fund protecting Australians since 1932, conducted the survey as part of their partnership with the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) to understand the prevalence of breast cancer self-checking and general awareness of what to check for during a self-examination.

"We know that one-in-eight Australian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime and eight women will die each dayⁱⁱ, which makes being breast aware so vital," said Dr Sarah Hosking, CEO of NBCF.

"We save lives through early detection. Research into early detection has resulted in a national breast screening program, which has helped Australians receive the right treatment at the right time, significantly improving survival rates."

In 2016, it is estimated over 16,000 Australians will be diagnosed with breast cancer.ⁱⁱ While the incidence of breast cancer increases with age, it can strike women at any age and can also affect men too. Australians need to be conducting frequent breast checks and become more breast aware. This means becoming familiar with the unique shape, texture and feel of their breasts to increase early detection of unusual characteristics that may need closer examination by the doctor.

Despite the importance of early detection, the survey results show that the understanding of early signs of breast cancer is surprisingly low, preventing them from doing breast self-exams properly. Women aged 35 to 49 and over-50 cited not knowing what to look for as a reason they don't conduct self-checks (**40%** and **27%** respectively), while for many it is simply they forget to check (**58%** and **62%**).

Nearly half of women aged 35 to 49 (**44%**) along with almost a third of women over-50 (**31%**) have also never been to the doctor for a professional breast exam. Women aged 18 to 34 have the lowest knowledge of what to look (**63%**) or feel (**61%**) for during a self-exam, with **40%** neglecting the practice because they feel they're too young to need them.ⁱ

Jenny Williams, Chief Marketing Officer, HCF, said, "HCF has helped more than 7,000 of our members through breast cancer in the last five years and we know that it has a profound impact on people and their families. Like NBCF we are focused on empowering people to take a proactive approach to their health by educating on how to check their breasts."

Eight percent of women have found a painful lump in their breast, while **21%** reported finding a hard but painless lump. Such lumps and other relatively unknown symptoms, can be warning signs of breast cancer.ⁱ

The key changes to look for when doing a breast self-exam includeⁱⁱⁱ:

- A new lump or lumpiness, especially if it's only in one breast
- Your breast changing in size or shape

- Any changes to the nipple, such as redness, inversion, crusting or discharge without squeezing
- A change in the skin, like redness or dimpling
- An unusual pain that doesn't disappear.

After finding that **62%** of Australian women feel more education would encourage them to check their breasts regularlyⁱ, HCF and NBCF are launching *Hands On* at participating HCF branches during October.

The campaign, which incorporates educational sets of replica breasts ranging from healthy to showing symptoms that should be flagged with your doctor, is designed to teach Australians the breast cancer warning signs to check for in order to improve detection. Visit hcf.com.au/hands-on for more information about the *Hands On* learning station, doctor-led Q&A sessions and information on breast self-examination.

The HCF *Hands On* Experience is part of an ongoing partnership between HCF and NBCF to support breast cancer research. While early detection is vital, both HCF and NBCF believe research is key to achieving the goal of zero deaths from breast cancer by 2030. Better understanding of how tumours originate, grow and spread results in better ways to prevent and treat breast cancer.

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Additional data from the HCF survey and interviews with Jenny Williams, HCF Chief Marketing Officer, and Dr Sarah Hosking, NBCF CEO, are available on request.

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About HCF

HCF, leading not-for-profit health fund protecting Australians since 1932, covers 1.5 million members with health and life insurance, community care, travel and pet insurance.

On average over the last five years, HCF has paid out more cents in every dollar in premiums to members as benefits than the industry average. With over 35,000 specialists participating in its Medical Gap Cover Scheme and approximately 10,000 providers participating in its 100% back *More for You* programs, HCF gives members access to quality healthcare with no gaps or minimal costs compared to non-participating providers.

To empower members to put their health first, HCF also offers a range of health and lifestyle services including its *My Health Guardian* health management program, mobile Victor Chang Heart Health Checks and *My Global Specialist* second opinion service.

HCF's national network of retail outlets and Australian-based call centres have earned multi-award winning status. HCF members also have access to low cost, high quality services at HCF Dental Centres and HCF Eyecare Centres.

Having contributed \$50 million to support the health services research funded by the HCF Research Foundation, HCF is devoted to investing in the future of Australia's health. To learn more about HCF go to hcf.com.au/about-us

About the National Breast Cancer Foundation

The National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) is the only national body that funds life-changing breast cancer research with money raised entirely by the Australian public. Breast cancer is the most common life-threatening cancer facing Australian women, with eight women dying from the disease each day – mothers, sisters, wives, daughters and friends.

Research is the only way to prevent deaths, and improve how breast cancer is diagnosed, managed and treated. By funding only world-class research, NBCF is working towards a goal of zero deaths from breast cancer by 2030.

In total, since 1994, NBCF has awarded more than \$127 million to around 430 Australian-based research projects to improve the health and well-being of those affected by breast cancer. In 2016 NBCF has committed over \$12 million to fund more than 30 research projects that will contribute towards their goal of zero deaths from breast cancer by 2030. nbcf.org.au

ⁱ OmniPoll. Consumer survey conducted nationally among women aged 18 years and over. (n=1071). Fieldwork conducted 25-30 August 2016.

ⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Cancer Australia 2012. Breast Cancer in Australia: an overview. Cancer series no. 71. Cat no. CAN 67. Canberra: AIHW.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2016 National Breast Cancer Foundation: <http://nbcf.org.au/news/research-news/how-to-check-for-cancer-symptoms-2/>.