Breast cancer is the most common cancer among New Zealand women with more than 2600 new cases expected this year – also approximately 20 men will be diagnosed\(^1\).

More than 650 women will die from the disease this year – making it the leading cause of cancer-related death in females\(^1\).

New Zealand women have a one in nine chance of developing breast cancer during their lifetime\(^5\).

90-95% of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease\(^3\).

Getting older is the most common risk factor: over 75% of new cases are among women 50 years and over\(^4\).

Women of all ages, especially those over the age of 40 years, need to be ‘breast aware’. In being ‘breast aware’ women should:
- Know what is normal for them
- Know what changes to look and feel for
- Report changes without delay to their family doctor
- Attend mammography screening if appropriate for their age

Changes in the breast that may indicate cancer:
- A new lump or thickening
- A change in the breast shape or size
- Pain in the breast that is unusual
- Puckering or dimpling of the skin
- Any change in one nipple, such as:
  - a turned-in (inverted) nipple
  - a discharge that occurs without squeezing
- A rash or reddening of the skin that appears only on the breast\(^5\)

Early detection of breast cancer increases a woman’s chance of survival. Today, close to 85% of NZ women diagnosed with breast cancer will survive five years or more\(^6\) and the death rate has decreased by nearly 19.3% between 1997-2007\(^7\).

New Zealand’s free, nationwide breast screening programme, BreastScreen Aotearoa, checks women with no breast cancer signs/symptoms – ‘well’ women - for early breast cancer between 45-69 years of age with a screening mammogram every two years. To enrol phone 0800 270 200\(^4\).

A breast thermogram should not be a substitute (adequate replacement) for a screening or diagnostic mammogram\(^8\).

Maori women have an 42.8% higher incidence of breast cancer than non-Maori women. Also, they have an almost 50% greater risk of dying from breast cancer than non-Maori\(^7\); one important reason for this is they are presenting with breast cancer at a later stage of disease. The reasons for their presenting late are complex, but are shown by the low rate of attendance by Maori women for screening mammograms\(^9\).

Pacific women in NZ are 54% more likely to die of breast cancer than other NZ women despite having a similar risk to other women of developing the disease\(^9\).

**Remember - early detection saves breasts and lives**
References