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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government Releases Breast Screening Report

The Australian Government today released an expert committee's evaluation of the BreastScreen Australia program and said that the valuable program will continue.

The program has reduced the mortality rate in the key 50-69 years age group by 21-28 per cent and that the program was well accepted by women, broadly available and cost-effective.

The expert committee have made nineteen recommendations as to how to improve, better target and expand the program.

The Government and the states and territories are currently working together to consider those recommendations with a view to these being further discussed at the Australian Health Ministers' Conference in November.

BreastScreen Australia is a population based screening program that invites women aged 50-69 years for screening for breast cancer at two-yearly intervals. Women aged 40-49 years and 70 years and over are also eligible for screening. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the program in reducing breast cancer mortality through early detection, and to identify gaps in delivering the program.

The committee supports the continued two-yearly screening of women aged 50-69 years, noting that this group offers the greatest potential for further reducing mortality rates through increased participation.

The committee also recommends better targeting of women in screening for breast cancer to ensure those most at risk are able to access free screening.

BreastScreen Australia is jointly funded by the Australian, state and territory governments. State and Territory governments have primary responsibility for the implementation of the program in their jurisdictions. The Australian Government provides overall co-ordination of policy formulation, national data collection, quality control, monitoring and evaluation.

Australia has one of the best breast cancer screening programs in the world. The Government will work closely with states and territories to ensure women who derive the most benefit across the country continue to have access to screening services well into the future.

The report was completed by a committee comprised of Australian and international experts, and state and territory and consumer representatives. The committee was chaired by Dr Helen Zorbas, Director, National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre. I thank the Committee for their work on this important report.

The report will be available by midday at www.cancerscreening.gov.au

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.