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Women in South Eastern Sydney Local Health District unaware of their breast cancer risk

Far too many women in South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) may be unaware of their risk of breast cancer, despite the fact that 9 in 10 women diagnosed do not have a family history.

More than two-thirds of women (65 per cent) surveyed by the Cancer Institute NSW think they are not at risk of developing breast cancer because of a lack of family history.

South Eastern Sydney Illawarra BreastScreen Director, Robyn Schubert, said this lack of personal susceptibility to breast cancer demonstrates the need to continue urging women locally to have a mammogram with BreastScreen NSW every two years.

“The risk is real for every woman aged 50 to 74. One in eight women in NSW will develop breast cancer in their lifetime and less than 10 per cent of them will have a family history,” Ms Schubert said.

“That’s why all women in this age group should screen for breast cancer, regardless of whether they have a family history.

“By detecting breast cancer early, breast screening not only saves lives but also reduces the likelihood of a woman needing invasive treatment, such as a mastectomy or chemotherapy. We have come a long way with cancer treatment but the reality is that the more extensive the cancer is, the more it can detrimentally affect quality of life.

“We’re encouraged by the fact that more than 33,000 women in our local health district get a free, state-of-the-art mammogram through BreastScreen NSW each year.

“We have six fixed BreastScreen sites, and a mobile van which visits various locations between January and April each year, making it easy for women to access the service.”

In 2019, it’s expected more than 713 women in south eastern Sydney will be told they have breast cancer and there will be about 107 women who will die from breast cancer.

Ms Schubert said that when it comes to reducing breast cancer risk, it is also vital to focus on lifestyle factors within a woman’s control.

“While a family history cannot be changed, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, reducing alcohol intake and quitting smoking are all things that can significantly reduce a woman’s risk of developing breast cancer,” Ms Schubert said.

In addition to 46 BreastScreen sites, BreastScreen NSW has 16 mobile vans that provide services to about 180 locations across NSW, including in rural and remote areas.

To book a mammogram today with BreastScreen NSW, please phone 13 20 50. You can search for your nearest BreastScreen NSW service or book online by visiting breastscreen.nsw.gov.au.