

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH, AND PINK RIBBON DAY

Statement by Minister for Disability Services

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Disability Services) [2.18 pm]: October is breast cancer awareness month and the 24th is pink ribbon day. Madam Deputy Speaker, I compliment you on your choice of colours today. Some 1 100 men and women are diagnosed every year in Western Australia with breast cancer. The average age of breast cancer sufferers is 58, though one-third of all diagnoses occurs in women aged younger than 50 years. Although it primarily affects women, one per cent of all breast cancers occur in men.

It is encouraging that, for the general female population, the mortality rate for breast cancer has declined, largely due to education and early detection through screening. For women with disabilities though, particularly intellectual disability, and for non-English speaking women, the indicators are not so heartening. The risk of breast cancer increases with age, yet only 41 per cent of women aged over 70 years who are disabled have ever had a mammogram. Incidentally, in 2000 the Howard government abandoned a study aimed at sourcing reliable data on which to base future policies and programs for older women with disabilities. Women with disabilities are not accessing screening services because they perceive there to be inaccessible venues and inaccessible medical equipment, little information in alternative formats and no attendant care support, and because they rely upon carers to identify the need for breast screening.

To deal with this, last year my predecessor, Sheila McHale, launched “A Guide to Breast Health” aimed particularly at women with intellectual disabilities. I would urge all members to make sure that they have copies of this at their electorate offices. This is a user-friendly guide explaining pictorially why women need regular examinations and how the examinations are carried out. It also includes information for family members and carers.

BreastScreen WA is funded by the Department of Health and provides a free breast screening service for all women in WA over the age of 40. I compliment the Minister for Health for his initiative in relation to the positron emission tomography machine, which is equally important in this matter. BreastScreen WA has six metropolitan screening services and four mobile units that service country towns and outer metropolitan areas. It is a fantastic service that has saved and will continue to save the lives of women in this state through early detection. A number of groups, often staffed by volunteers, offer services and support to people whose lives have been touched by breast cancer. They include the Breast Cancer Foundation of Western Australia; Action on Breast Cancer Western Australia; Brownes Cancer Support Centre, Nedlands; Dragons Abreast Western Australia; and the Northam Breast Cancer Support Group. For women with English as a second language, BreastScreen WA offers services to these women, as does the Gosnells Women’s Health Service, the Ishar Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health, the Rockingham Women’s Health Centre and Women’s Healthworks, to name just a few.

I urge all women, particularly women with disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to acknowledge the indiscriminate nature of breast cancer, and access the screening services available to them across the state. For the information of members, I will lay a copy of this on the table of the house.

[See paper 859.]