

Supporting
Australians
for 15 years

Breast
Cancer
Network
Australia



30 July 2013

Department of Health and Ageing
Chemotherapy Review
MDP 901
GPO Box 9848
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Review of funding arrangements for chemotherapy services

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) is the peak national organisation for Australians affected by breast cancer, and consists of a network of more than 80,000 individual members, more than 90 per cent of whom have had a diagnosis of breast cancer. We work to ensure that women diagnosed with breast cancer, and their families, receive the very best information, treatment, care and support possible.

In 2013, approximately 15,000 Australian women, and 125 men, will be diagnosed with breast cancer. It is predicted that the number of people diagnosed will continue to increase each year.

Many of those diagnosed will require treatment with chemotherapy. Around twenty per cent will also require treatment with trastuzumab.

BCNA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper to the *Review of the funding arrangements for chemotherapy services* (the Review).

BCNA is not in a position to comment on the Terms of Reference of the Review; however we can speak on issues that affect women, and men, who receive treatment with these drugs.

For Australians diagnosed with breast cancer, the primary concern is that they are able to access the best possible treatments and care, and that this is provided in a timely and equitable manner to all patients. It is vital that the downstream effects of funding arrangements do not disadvantage patients.

For many people, breast cancer treatment may be their first significant experience with the health care system. People with breast cancer should be able to navigate the complexities of this system without the additional stress of delayed or otherwise inadequate access to chemotherapy treatment.

We are also concerned about a funding issue that has been raised with us by some of our members living in New South Wales. Public patients receiving infusible/injectable chemotherapy in many NSW public hospitals are being required to pay the PBS copayment for their chemotherapy (and trastuzumab) medicines. We believe NSW hospitals, and one Queensland hospital (Redcliffe), are the only public hospitals in Australia to levy this charge. We first raised this issue with the NSW Health Minister in February 2012. In June 2012, the NSW Ministry of Health promised to investigate the budgetary impact of waiving all copayments for public patients receiving chemotherapy, to bring NSW into line with other states. We have had no advice on the outcome of this investigation and the issue has not been resolved.

BCNA is very concerned about the inequity in this situation, as are our members who have complained to us about it. Had these women been living in another state, Victoria for example, they would have had no charge for their chemotherapy medicines. Some NSW women are paying up to five copayments for their breast cancer chemotherapy treatments, e.g. for a combination of up to three different chemotherapy medicines, as well as anti-nausea and neutropenia medicines.

We trust that the Review will consider and prioritise the needs of Australians with cancer. BCNA would be pleased to participate in the Review's consumer consultation process where appropriate, including through the provision of one or more trained Consumer Representatives.

Please contact Nicca Grant on (03) 9805 2585 or ngrant@bcna.org.au if you have any questions or would like to discuss ways in which women affected by breast cancer can be involved in the Review.



Kathy Wells
National Policy Manager