

Australian women's health declining across key measures, landmark global report reveals

Breast cancer rates rising among younger women as national screening gap widens

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Lynette Bolton

Breast cancer survivor, media personality, TV host, wife of former Sydney Swans champion & mother-of-two, **SYDNEY**

Grab A

How did you feel when you first discovered a lump in your breast & how did you respond?

When I found the lump in my breast, it was of November 2025. I was just in the shower, and I felt something that I hadn't felt before. There's no history in my family. I don't tick any of the boxes of high risk. And it shocked me. It really did shock me. I thankfully did not put it off because I know that as mums, as women, especially that time of the year when there's a lot of other things on, it's very easy to put it in the too hard basket. But I did go and get it checked out and 10 days later I was officially diagnosed with breast cancer.

Grab B

How active were you before your breast cancer diagnosis, & how did that change once you started treatment?

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I felt like I was the healthiest I'd ever been. I was exercising, it was summer, we were going out, we were paddle boarding, swimming, all of the things, going to the gym. And then all of a sudden that stopped, just flat out stopped.

Grab C

On June 13, 2025 you were informed you were in the "all clear" & had no remaining cancer cells following surgery. Can you reflect on that moment?

With cancer, chemo's once a week, once a week, once a week. And then you have what we call, I had the Red Devil, where all my hair fell out and my nails started falling out. It's a lot. I'm not sure if I've processed even being diagnosed, let alone not having cancer anymore.

Grab D

Can you reflect on using your social media platform to urge women to get checked for breast cancer?

I was at a breast cancer lunch in October of last year and we all pledged that we would go and get our boobs checked and I didn't. No one thinks it will happen to them. And so if I can use my platform, my voice, my story to encourage people to get checked and to not forget about themselves, then I will continue to do my videos until the cows come home.

Grab E**How important is early detection of breast cancer?**

It is so important to detect breast cancer early. The earlier we can find it, the more chance we have of the woman living a long and healthy life.

Grab F**According to The Hologic Global Women's Health Index data, only 23 per cent of Australian women were tested for cancer in the past year. Can you reflect on this?**

So the Hologic Global Women's Health Index has found that in the last year, only 23 per cent of women have been tested for cancer. And it's not a lot. It doesn't surprise me though, because as women, we are so busy. We're always looking after everybody else. If we feel a little twinge or something, we say that we'll get to it later. But the problem is women, there's more cancer than ever at the moment. And we really have to have that early diagnosis and that early assessment to be able to get women into the incredible services that we have. And if we aren't going and getting tested, then how are we going to know?

Grab G**What is your message to other Australians living with breast cancer, & their families?**

So if I have a message for other women living with breast cancer and for their families, it is you're not alone. A lot of us are going through this. You are stronger than you think and you've got this.

Jude Bolton

Former Sydney Swans champion, AFL commentator, radio co-host, Lynette's husband & father-of-two, **SYDNEY**

Grab A

How did you react to Lynette's diagnosis of breast cancer?

When Lynette got diagnosed with breast cancer, I think it was just in shock. I think I remember her coming up to me and sort of saying, 'I've got to go back for a biopsy. I've been to the GP the day before.' And yeah, she'd found the lump.

Grab B

What role have you played in supporting Lynette through breast cancer?

In terms of my role, I think just for any carer or any partner, you're just looking to step up and help out where you can. You feel a little bit helpless. My natural thing is, can I fix something? Can I do it? And you can't. You just have to sit there and just support where you can.

Grab C

What has this experience taught you about Lynette's strength?

What I've learned is just how strong my wife is I think from that aspect. I've been sort of saying to her, "It's one year out of your life to set up the next 40-odd. We just want to do that and have every focus on getting her healthy and back to the way she wants to be and the way we want to be." And yeah, I think it's just been a crazy sort of ride, a crazy thing that you don't ever want to go through, but it happens so often.

Grab D

What is your message to other carers & family members of those diagnosed with breast cancer?

Be that sounding board, cop a bit of the wrath. I mean, what Lynette's been through and what so many people have to go through is just, is just so confronting, it's their fight to battle and you're just there as a support network and it's going to be tough. But there's a light at the end of the tunnel and we've got incredible doctors, nurses and that support network.

Professor Bruce Mann

Specialist Breast Surgeon, Head of Breast Surgical Research, Director of Research at Breast Cancer Trials and Professor of Surgery, University of Melbourne, **MELBOURNE**

Grab A

Why is it concerning that breast cancer is increasingly being diagnosed in younger women?

Breast cancer is being diagnosed increasingly in younger women, and this is a problem for a couple of reasons. One of them is that the cancers in younger women are often more aggressive, which means more treatments needed and the risk of death from breast cancer can be higher. Related to that is our screening programme is focused on women 50 to 75, and so women who are in their 30s or in their 40s are not typically invited to screening. And so many women will at that age will present with a cancer at a later stage and it's a cancer that potentially could have been diagnosed earlier if we had the appropriate screening in place.

Grab B

What does earlier detection of breast cancer mean for a woman's treatment & recovery?

Early diagnosis through screening is vital. We did some work looking at women we had looked after in our service. What we found is those who had been undergoing screening required on average half the amount of treatment and were 75 per cent less likely to die from breast cancer than those who had not been screened.

Grab C

What would better-resourced public breast screening look like in practice, & what difference could it make for Australian women?

While the current service offered through Breast Screen Australia is excellent, there are issues. The first is participation. Not enough women are having their screening. It's never been above 56%. It needs to be much more. The second is that we should introduce risk-adjusted screening, identify the women at higher risk who may benefit from some other form of screening and work out how we can offer that at scale.

Grab D

The Hologic Global Women's Health Index Year 5 data found only 23 per cent of Australian women were tested for cancer in the past year. Can you reflect on this?

The finding that Australia's performance in the Hologic five-year Women's Global Health Index has declined over the five years is really concerning. It's easy to assume that things are fine and we can just leave them, but that's not the case. It's constant vigilance and we need to focus on this and maintain the focus in maintaining and improving our performance.

Grab E

What role can newer breast imaging technologies play in improving early detection?

Newer breast imaging technologies will allow us to find more cancers early. This is particularly in women with higher breast density where the contrast studies, either contrast mammography or MRI, have the higher sensitivity. They're more likely to find a cancer if it's there than the standard mammogram.

Grab F

Innovation in breast imaging is moving quickly. What happens when access & reimbursement don't keep pace. Who ultimately bears the cost of that gap?

Innovation in breast imaging is moving rapidly. When access and reimbursement don't keep up, we have a problem that we will end up with a two-tier system. That means those who know about the developments and have the money will be able to access them. Those who may not have the knowledge or not have the funds, they won't have access and their outcomes will be poorer.

Grab G

What is your key message to Australian women?

Early diagnosis is vital. If you think there's a problem in one of your breasts, get it checked out. If you haven't had screening recently, get screened.

Luan Lawrenson-Woods, 54

Award-winning patient advocate, speaker & podcast host with a history of breast cancer & reconstruction, **SYDNEY**

Grab A

How important was early detection in your breast cancer journey?

Early detection of my breast cancer was life-saving for me. My breast cancer had spread through my right breast. And from a biopsy on some of my nodes, we could see that it was on the move. If I hadn't been diagnosed at that time, it may have been that I would have had incurable breast cancer, which is a life-limiting disease.

Grab B

How important is preventive healthcare to you?

I'm very proactive about my preventative healthcare. Australia has a range of preventative screening programs and I've accessed two of them, which have led to early detection.

Grab C

The Hologic Global Women's Health Index data found only 23 per cent of Australian women were tested for cancer in the past year. As someone who has lived through breast cancer, what are your thoughts on this?

When I heard that the Hologic Global Women's Health Index had found that only 23 per cent of Australian women in the last year have been tested for cancer, I was extremely concerned, because that means that there may be women out there who have a cancer, and it hasn't been diagnosed.

Grab D

Why do you think so many women are not prioritising their healthcare needs, & what barriers are they facing?

I think so many women aren't making their healthcare a priority because they've got so many other things that they're responsible in their life. They're doing all the things, from work to care and responsibilities, to looking after the home, managing budgets. And there's also the increased specialist costs alongside the increased cost of living.

Grab E

What would you say to other women who keep delaying health checks or screening appointments?

Don't leave yourself to last. Looking after your health is not selfish. You deserve the best healthcare that there is.

Kensi Naicker

General Manager, Australia & New Zealand, Hologic, **SYDNEY**

Grab A

What is the Hologic Global Women's Health Index and why should Australian women care about it?

The Hologic Global Women's Health Index is one of the largest studies conducted over 145,000 participants over 144 countries, and this was started in conjunction with Gallup in 2020, and we're now up to year five in terms of data.

Grab B

What are the five dimensions of women's health covered in The Hologic Global Women's Health Index?

The five dimensions of the Hologic Global Women's Health Index are Preventive Care, Emotional Health, Opinions on Health and Safety, Basic Needs, and Individual Health.

Grab C

What does The Hologic Global Women's Health Index reveal about the state of Australian women's health?

In year five on the Hologic Global Women's Health Index, Australia scored 59 out of 100, just ahead of the global average of 54.

Grab D

What finding/s from The Hologic Global Women's Health Index concerned you the most?

On the five dimensions, Australia, over the last five years, has been deteriorating across these dimensions. Of particular concern is when we compare ourselves to other modern societies, and I'll use the example of Singapore, where 97% of women feel safe walking home at night. For Australian women, this number is 54% feel safe walking home at night, which I think is a terrible result.

Grab E

Can you reflect on Australian women having their emotional health and basic needs met?

Across the five years, what we've seen is a further deterioration of Australian women look from a food security perspective. 22% of women feel less secure about where their food is coming from, which is quite a troubling statistic, and 11% from a shelter perspective about where they're going to be housed.

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