

2005 Public Health Awards for Excellence and Innovation:

Public Health Programs Award for Excellence

Don't just sit there

PapScreen Victoria/The Cancer Council Victoria

In response to a ten-year low in Victorian cervical screening rates, PapScreen developed and implemented a strategy that prompted many older under-screened women to have a Pap test.

Since its inception in 1991, the Victorian cervical screening program has achieved considerable gains, resulting in significant decreases in both incidence and deaths from cervical cancer. Impressively, Victoria has the lowest mortality rate of all Australian states and territories.

Despite these gains, recent data from the Victorian Cervical Cytology Registry (VCCR) indicated that fewer Victorian women were participating in the program. In 2002–03, Victorian cervical screening rates fell to 63.9 per cent, a significant decrease compared to 1996–97 when 70 per cent of women were screened. This decline was worrying as regular Pap tests can prevent up to 90 per cent of cervical cancer. In response, PapScreen decided to create and run a mass media campaign targeting targeting women most at risk; older under-screened women, and women who have never been screened. This was the first time that a state-based cervical screening program had created its own campaign.

An evidence-based approach was adopted throughout the development, implementation and evaluation of the campaign, which included:

- telephone interviews with 32 women to inform the creative brief
- nine focus groups with women to shape the final concept
- presenting the final concept to ten women
- a television and radio advertising campaign, entitled 'Don't just sit there'
- a media buy based on the target audience's media consumption
- post-campaign evaluation including telephone interviews with 1,000 women, and analysis of VCCR data and telephone calls made to the Cancer Council's Cancer Helpline.

Critical to the campaign's success was the availability of accessible services. Cancer Council Victoria research indicates that for some women making an appointment for a Pap test can be difficult, and to be told that there is a waiting period can increase their anxiety. To ensure that service providers had resources available to cope with the additional demand generated by the campaign, PapScreen communicated with laboratories and service providers, updated the Web-based list of Victorian Pap test providers and provided funding for additional women's health clinics.

PapScreen's strategy was a success. On average, an additional 535 women had a Pap test each working day during the campaign period and, importantly, most of these women were older under-screened women.

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