

# Breast screening and Victorian women with an intellectual disability

## Women with an intellectual disability achieve equality in breast screening

According to the Victorian Population Health Survey of People with an Intellectual Disability 2013 (VPHS-ID 2013), women with an intellectual disability aged 60 years or over (91.5 per cent) were more likely to have had a mammogram in the preceding two years than females aged 60 years or over from the general Victorian population (65.4 per cent). There was no difference in screening rates in the preceding two years between women with an intellectual disability and the general Victorian population in the 50–59 year age group (78.1 per cent and 82.2 per cent respectively) (Figure 1).

## Improvements in breast cancer screening rates for women with an intellectual disability since 2009

There has been a significant improvement in breast cancer screening rates for women with an intellectual disability since 2009. A higher proportion of women with an intellectual disability aged 50–59 years (78.1 per cent) in the current survey (VPHS-ID 2013) had had a mammogram in the preceding two years compared with women in the same age group from the previous survey (VPHS-ID 2009) (42.9 per cent).

## Cancer screening project targeting women with an intellectual disability

Every two years all women on the electoral roll aged 50–74 years are offered free screening for breast cancer (mammogram). Women with an intellectual disability who are not on the electoral roll miss out on this invitation to participate. After the results of the VPHS-ID 2009, which showed lower levels of breast screening for women with an intellectual disability than the general population, the Victorian Government funded Cancer Council Victoria to develop and distribute information packages to more than 7,000 women with an intellectual disability inviting them to participate in cancer screening. Information was provided to the women's support networks and their doctors, and workshops were held for disability support staff. The improvements in cancer screening demonstrates the benefits of investing in targeted health promotion

activities for people with an intellectual disability for whom mainstream health promotion campaigns may not be effective.

## How often should breast screening occur?

BreastScreen Australia recommends a screening mammogram once every two years for women aged 50–69 years. Women aged 40–49 years and 70 years and over are also able to be screened.

## Linking in to breast screening

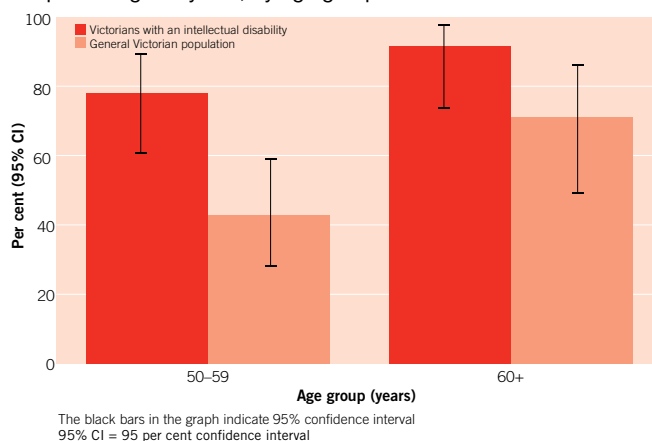
For a woman with an intellectual disability, her GP may suggest breast screening as part of an annual health review. Alternatively the woman or her support network can organise a free screening mammogram by phoning 13 20 50. BreastScreen is free and a doctor's referral is not required.

## BreastScreen Victoria services

If a woman with an intellectual disability has not been screened, or if there have been difficulties with screening, BreastScreen Victoria can offer advice and resources to assist.

BreastScreen Victoria has permanent screening and assessment clinics. A mobile screening service is also available. Women can attend any screening clinic that is convenient to them.

Figure 1: Females aged 50 years or older who had a mammogram in the preceding two years, by age group



## For further information

The VPHS-ID 2013 is a statewide survey the Department of Health and Human Services undertook to collect information on the health and wellbeing of people with an intellectual disability in Victoria. This is the second time this survey has been carried out in Victoria.

The full report of the VPHS-ID 2013 is available at:

[www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus)

Further information about BreastScreen Victoria can be found at:

[www.breastscreen.org.au](http://www.breastscreen.org.au)

'Being a healthy woman' provides information in an easy-read format to help women with an intellectual disability learn more about their health and is available at:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/pdf/being\\_a\\_healthy\\_woman\\_63-68.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/pdf/being_a_healthy_woman_63-68.pdf)

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Available at [www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/survey/vphs-id.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/survey/vphs-id.htm)

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