

8 November 2018

Professor Robyn Ward  
Chair  
Medical Services Advisory Committee  
Department of Health and Ageing  
MDP 851  
GPO Box 9848  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Professor Ward

**Re: Autologous Fat Grafting (AFG)**

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) is the peak national organisation for Australians personally affected by breast cancer. We support, inform, represent and connect people whose lives have been affected by breast cancer. BCNA represents more than 120,000 individual members and 300 breast cancer support groups from across Australia.

BCNA is pleased to support an application to the Medical Services Advisory Committee from BreastSurgANZ and the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons for the use of Autologous Fat Grafting (AFG) for the treatment of defects arising from breast cancer surgery.

Over BCNA's 20 year history, we have repeatedly heard from women about the impact breast cancer surgery has on their lives. Poor cosmetic outcomes can lead to loss of self-esteem and self-confidence. Research undertaken by Dr Kerry Sherman, Macquarie University, found that women with low body image and low self-compassion following breast cancer surgery are more likely to experience greater levels of distress. Conversely, women who have a good cosmetic outcome report improvements in emotional wellbeing.

*[Breast reconstruction] has given me my life back - restored most of my self-esteem and confidence as a woman. – BCNA Breast Reconstruction Survey respondent*

*I'm not reminded about having breast cancer every time I look at my body. [Breast reconstruction] has helped my emotional recovery significantly. – BCNA Breast Reconstruction Survey respondent*

Breast reconstruction surgery is recognised internationally to improve both quality of life and recovery from the psychological trauma of a mastectomy.<sup>i</sup> However Australia's breast reconstruction rate is low compared with similar countries –18.3% in Australia<sup>ii</sup> compared with 21% in the UK and up to 25% in the USA.<sup>iii</sup> In rural and remote parts of Australia, reconstruction rates are lower again – between 9.9% and 12.2%.<sup>iv</sup>

Improving access to breast reconstruction surgery, so that all women who wish to have a reconstruction are able to do so, is a key advocacy issue for BCNA. Cancer Australia similarly acknowledges the importance of breast reconstruction in its *Influencing best practice in breast cancer* statement which states that it is 'not appropriate to perform a mastectomy without first discussing with the patient the options of immediate or delayed breast reconstruction'.

BCNA hears from our members about difficulties they face accessing breast reconstruction surgery. These include high out-of-pocket costs in the private health system (reports of up to \$18,000), long waiting lists in some public hospitals, and no access to reconstruction surgery in some regional and rural areas.

We strongly believe that the Australian health system needs to invest in technologies that will make it easier for women to access breast reconstruction following surgery for breast cancer, regardless of where they live and how much money they have.

We note that Autologous Fat Grafting is evidence-based and used in Australia and other countries. We support MBS funding for AFG to provide an additional, affordable breast reconstruction option for all women who might benefit from it.

I am happy to discuss this matter with you and can be contacted at [kpilatti@bcna.org.au](mailto:kpilatti@bcna.org.au) or 03 9805 2534.

Yours sincerely



Kirsten Pilatti  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>i</sup> Spillane, AJ. 2016 *What is new in the surgical management and prevention of breast cancer?* Med J Aust 2016; 204 (8): 311-314

<sup>ii</sup> Flitcroft et al., 2016. *Documenting patterns of breast reconstruction in Australia: the national picture.* The Breast, iss. 30

<sup>iii</sup> Spillane, AJ. 2016 *What is new in the surgical management and prevention of breast cancer?* Med J Aust 2016; 204 (8): 311-314

<sup>iv</sup> Flitcroft et al., 2016. *Documenting patterns of breast reconstruction in Australia: the national picture.* The Breast, iss. 30