

# Media Release

## Ingrid Stitt MP

Minister for Mental Health

Minister for Ageing

Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Acting Minister for Health

Acting Minister for Ambulance Services



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## CULTURALLY SAFE BREAST SCREENING FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN

An Aboriginal-led breast screening initiative to improve cancer outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women has recorded an increase in testing numbers – as the Labor Government works to drive down the gap in cancer survival rates in Victoria through the *Victorian Cancer Plan 2024-2028*.

Now in its seventh year, the Beautiful Shawl Project – a partnership between BreastScreen Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and dozens of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) across the state – provides customised shawls that are culturally appropriate, familiar and beautiful to wear during screenings.

Depicting culture and Country, the shawls are designed by talented women Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and are given as gifts for the clients to keep after the screening.

The project is already having a significant, positive impact with the number of screenings among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women 39.5 per cent higher in 2023/24 than in the previous year – 406 screenings were completed through the initiative during this period.

Since the Beautiful Shawl Project started in 2018, 1,342 breast screens have been conducted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The project works with ACCOs and Aboriginal-led services to provide free breast screening on Country – offering a culturally safe and responsive alternative to traditional testing.

It won the Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Award at the 2024 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards for its progress in increasing access to breast screens across Victoria.

The *Victorian Budget 2024/25* has delivered more than \$70 million in funding for initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians, such as the Beautiful Shawl Project.

Part of this funding is supporting the development and implementation of VACCHO's *Aboriginal Cancer Journey Strategy 2023-2028*, an expanded statewide Culture and Kinship program and a culturally safe framework to boost participation in cancer clinical trials.

The Labor Government is working to improve the cancer survival rate across Victoria through the recently launched *Victorian Cancer Plan 2024-2028*, which identifies ways to prevent cancer and boost access to care, treatment and support for all Victorians.

The new plan is made up of nine medium- and long-term goals, including increasing the one- and five-year survival rates, halving the proportion of people diagnosed with preventable cancers, boosting the proportion of women who rescreen for breast cancer and increasing clinical trial enrolments in regional and rural Victoria.

### Quote attributable to Acting Minister for Health Ingrid Stitt

*“When we enable Aboriginal-led teams to offer breast screening in familiar settings, we have better success at potentially saving more lives and driving down cancer rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.”*

### Quote attributable to VACCHO CEO Dr Jill Gallagher AO

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*“Each year we see more and more Aboriginal women screened as part of the Beautiful Shawl Project and I am proud that we’re able to provide this life-saving service to Community.”*

**Quote attributable to BreastScreen Victoria CEO Rita Butera**

*“We are incredibly proud of this important initiative – its growth over the years highlights that collaboration and community-led efforts are essential for achieving equitable access to our life-saving service.”*