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Women urged to check breasts

By Alexandra Laskie

Almost 12,000 middle-aged and older Brimbank women did not have their breasts checked for signs of cancer in the two years to 2015.

Just 53 per cent of women aged between 50 and 74 who live in the local government area had a mammogram between 2013 and 2015 with BreastScreen Victoria.

The not-for-profit, government funded program provides free mammographic screenings and recommends women aged between 50 and 74 have a breast screen every two years to find breast cancer early, before any symptoms are noticed and when treatment is likely to be most successful.

BreastScreen Victoria chief executive Vicki Pridmore said while Brimbank's screening participation rate was above the state average of 52 per cent, the organisation had a huge task ahead of it educating women in Melbourne's west about the benefits of regular mammograms.

"The western suburbs of Melbourne are the fastest growing in Australia," she said.

"We are currently working with Deakin University to investigate barriers to screening for women within culturally and linguistically diverse communities and will be acting on the findings of the study.

"BreastScreen Victoria is responsive to the cultural diversity in Melbourne's west and our clinics aim to be inclusive for all women."

She said about 75 per cent of women

diagnosed with breast cancer were aged over 50. "Regular breast screens are the best way to find breast cancer early, it takes 10 minutes, is with a woman and it's free," she said.

Kororoit MP Marlene Kairouz said she was concerned only 4296 women living in her state electorate, or 51 per cent, had their breasts checked for cancer between 2013 and 2015.

"This free service can have a substantial impact on people's lives," she said. "The worst of the winter cold has passed, and the BreastScreen Victoria clinics are nice and warm. A short, 10 minute appointment could be life-saving."

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