



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

BREAST CANCER NETWORK AUSTRALIA 20TH ANNIVERSARY

Thursday 5th April, 2018

The Honourable Jill Hennessy MP, Minister for Health and Ambulance Services

The Honourable Steve Bracks AC, former Premier

and **Mrs Terry Bracks AM**, former Board Member of BCNA

The Honourable Mary Wooldridge MP, Shadow Minister for Health and **Dr Andrew Barling**, former Board Member BCNA

Mrs Lyn Swinburne AM, Founder, Breast Cancer Network Australia

Ms Kathryn Fagg, Chair, Breast Cancer Network Australia

Ms Kirsten Pilatti, Chief Executive Officer, Breast Cancer Network Australia

Volunteers and staff

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this afternoon.

Tony and I warmly welcome you to Government House to mark the 20th anniversary of Breast Cancer Network Australia. And, for what I believe is in fact the launch of an anniversary year full of events.

I am not surprised that you will celebrate across a year. There is much to celebrate.

And it is the nature of women to throw a good celebration – and to prolong it – when we can!

But, as well, let's just spell it out. BCNA's founding mother, Lyn Swinburne, does know how to celebrate. She knows how to bring people together. At the same time, she does know how to get a serious message across.

Thanks to Lyn, and those who have joined and followed her, BCNA has much to celebrate.

When we were kids, 20 years seemed like forever. Funny, isn't it, but for many of us now, it seems more like just the blink of an eye.

And in that blink of an eye, BCNA has grown from an idea devised at Lyn's kitchen table, to the peak national body for Australians affected by breast cancer – with 120,000 members, 300 member groups and the largest health consumer online community in the country, with 16,000 members.

How is it that BCNA has grown and succeeded on such a scale in such a short space of time?

First, it was born from a pressing, but, at the time, an unmet need.

Lyn's own experience with a breast cancer diagnosis exposed the gap in support for the many thousands like her each year, who had to navigate the scary path that followed the news that 'You have breast cancer'.

Secondly, Lyn and early supporters – such as Raelene Boyle, Patricia Edgar, Karen Hayes and Debbie Goodin – worked together to create a new national organisation to make for a better, more supported journey for all the women and men affected by breast cancer.

For anyone who has known those women, imagine trying to say 'No' to any one of them, let alone to them as a group!

I think that BCNA has succeeded too because of the methods of engagement chosen and built upon in its short lifetime.

We saw it from the first Field of Women outside Parliament House in Canberra in 1998, with 10,000 pink silhouettes planted in a graphic representation of those diagnosed, and we have seen increased diagnosis across the years depicted in ever growing Fields of Women, so that we know, for example, that in 2017, some 17,000 Australians - mostly women but also some men - were diagnosed.

For the many thousands of us who have stood side by side on the hallowed turf of the MCG – or elsewhere – we know how awareness has been raised in the broader Australian community.

And we know how much that seemingly simple gesture has given to those who are facing the long road of breast cancer.

It tells them that they are not alone. Other people have trodden this path. And the challenges they are facing are seen and heard by the community at large. They have supporters, and they have them in large numbers.

But, of course, BCNA is much more than the Field of Women, and its trademark logo of the pink lady silhouette.

Its successes are too many to mention.

Amongst them, a 'freecall' telephone service, 'My Journey' and 'My Care' kits, national summits, help for those diagnosed in regional and rural areas, and help for young women, and men.

There is the advocacy, including for Herceptin to be listed on the PBS. And research – for example, into the work and financial impacts of a diagnosis.

And of course, the success of generous philanthropic partnerships, such as the one with Bakers Delight which alone has now raised more than \$18 million for the cause, or the generous support of, for example, Sussan, Berlei, and Australian Paper.

But to my mind, the most crucial ingredient to BCNA's success has been that the early founders set it up to ensure that its continuing success did not depend on them.

The structures and governance model that they put in place enabled the organisation to stand on its own two feet – to flourish – as times, methods of diagnosis, modalities of treatment, community awareness and patient needs have evolved.

Thank you to every Board member, staff member, volunteer, benefactor and participant.

Thank you to Founder Lyn Swinburne OAM and Founding Chair, Dr Patricia Edgar AM, as well as, former Chair Marg O'Donnell. And, of course, thank you to current Chair, Kathryn Fagg.

Thank you too to all the Board members across the last 20 years.

Thank you, also, to former CEO Christine Nolan, who over the last three years has worked tirelessly for the BCNA – we wish her and her family well, and welcome to Kirsten Pilatti, BCNA's new CEO.

And although we all wish that, in the future, there will be no need for a group such as BCNA, unless and until that day arrives, Australians can be so very grateful to have you.

Happy 20th birthday and thank you.

It's now my pleasure to invite the Honourable Jill Hennessy MP, Minister for Health, to address us.