

## Election Priorities 2007

# Breast cancer screening



The Cancer Council Australia calls on the next Australian Government to commit to leading the rollout of digital mammography in partnership with the states and territories during the next parliamentary term of office.

### **Why the federal election is a timely opportunity for the next Australian Government to lead the phasing in of digital mammography**

In 1995 Australia fully implemented population-based breast cancer screening, an achievement that has the potential to reduce breast cancer deaths by up to 40% among women aged 50-69 if screening participation rates are maximised.<sup>1</sup> The 12 years since have seen major changes in imaging and communications technology, leaving breast screening as the only radiological service in the health system using outdated x-ray film.

It is inevitable that mammography services in the national breast cancer screening program are provided with digital, rather than old-fashioned analogue, technology. The federal election is an ideal time for the next Australian Government to commit to leading the states and territories in phasing in digital mammography in the next parliamentary term, to ensure that the many benefits of bringing breast screening into line with current technology begin to be delivered within the next three years.

### **Benefits of digital mammography**

Key benefits of digital mammography include greatly improved efficiency and cost-effectiveness, potential for increased screening participation and reduced disadvantage for women in rural and remote areas. Specific benefits include:

- Images acquired as data can be transferred to any computer network location;
- Instant technical and quality analysis for radiographers;
- Efficiencies that would mean reduced travelling time, fewer appointments and less anxiety for women in regional areas (e.g. recall to mobile digital units rather than immobile assessment centres, fewer technical repeats, quicker results);
- Flexibility in radiology reading practice to reduce strain on an expensive workforce;
- Digital production of a fully electronic patient record (e-record);
- Greatly enhanced data management (no need for space-intensive film storage);
- Rapid automated digital transfer of results to GPs;
- Potential improvements in the detection of small cancers through improved technology;

The next Australian Government will be well-placed to build on the success of our national breast cancer screening program by leading the states and territories in bringing mammography into the digital age – an investment in significant long-term returns as we prepare to meet the health care challenges of population ageing.

<sup>1</sup> Tabar L, Yen MF, Vitak B, et al. Mammography service screening and mortality in breast cancer patients: 20-year follow-up before and after introduction of screening. *Lancet* 2003; 361: 1405-1410.