

Reporting breast density: information for GPs

BreastScreen Victoria has commenced reporting breast density to clients and GPs as part of the program.

Key points

- Breast density is being reported to BreastScreen Victoria's clients and their GPs under a staged rollout which commenced late June 2024. The rollout is expected to be state-wide by early 2025.
- Higher breast density can increase the risk of breast cancer and reduce the visibility of breast cancers on a mammogram.
- Mammograms still detect the majority of cancers in people with high breast density and remain the best screening modality at a population level.
- BreastScreen Victoria recommends that women with extremely dense breasts discuss their overall risk with a GP.
- GPs are supported by BreastScreen Victoria with training and an enquiry phone line.

What is breast density?

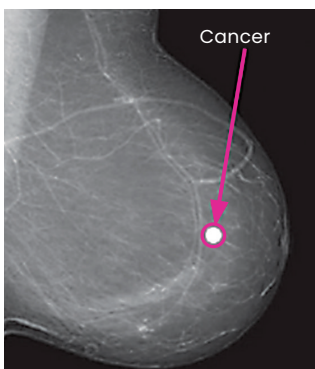
Breasts are made up of a combination of tissue:

- Fatty tissue
- Glandular tissue
- Connective/fibrous tissue

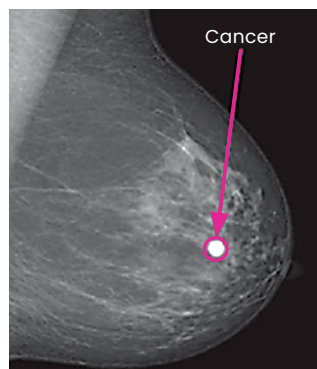
Women with high breast density have more fibroglandular tissue and less fatty tissue.

Breast density cannot be determined by the look and feel of a woman's breast or on physical examination. It can only be measured from a mammogram.

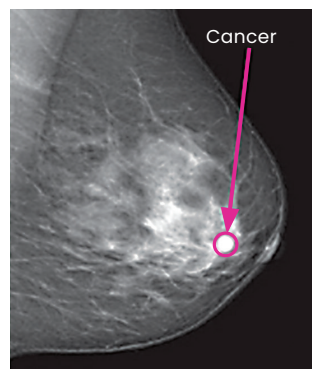
Breast density is commonly classified into four categories using the Breast Imaging Reporting and Data System (BI-RADS), American College of Radiology (ACR) 5th edition:



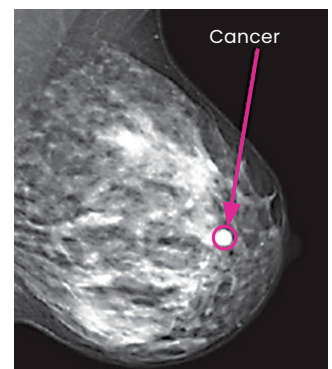
A: Breasts are almost entirely fatty (approximately 10% of women)



B: Breasts have scattered areas of fibroglandular tissue (approximately 40% of women)



C: Breasts are heterogeneously dense. The mix of non-dense and dense tissue may hide small cancers. (approximately 40% of women)



D: Breasts are extremely dense, reducing the visibility of cancers on a mammogram (approximately 10% of women)

Women with a BI-RADS category C or D classification are considered to have dense breasts. Dense breasts are common, with about 50% of women falling into these categories.

Breast density usually reduces with age, with more younger women having dense breasts compared to older women. It is also influenced by other factors including genetics, BMI, having had children, hormone replacement therapy, and anti-estrogen therapy.

Why is breast density important?

Dense breast tissue can mask the appearance of cancers in a mammogram, making them harder to detect. High breast density can also increase a person's risk of developing breast cancer.

Women with dense breasts (BI-RADS category C or D) have a 1.5-2 times higher risk of breast cancer compared to those in BI-RADS category B. The risk is higher for women with category D density compared to category C. Breast density should be considered alongside other risk factors including age, family history and lifestyle factors including smoking and alcohol intake.

How is breast density measured?

Breast density is measured from a mammogram. BreastScreen Victoria uses Volpara software to produce a measurement in a standardised, reproducible system without human variability.

No additional imaging is required to measure breast density, which means the screening process for women has not changed. No additional time or radiation is required to measure breast density.

The breast density of a small number of people can't be measured by Volpara's software. These clients are told that their breast density could not be measured.

How are we rolling out reporting?

We are rolling out the reporting of breast density in stages. We expect to be reporting breast density state-wide by early 2025.

If no evidence of breast cancer is found, clients are told their breast density category (BI-RADS A-D) with their screening result. They are also given information about breast density.

If clients are recalled to an assessment clinic, their breast density category is reported to them as part of this visit.

If a client nominates you as their GP, you will receive their breast density category with their result.

Clients with BI-RADS category A or B breast density are not advised to see a GP unless their family or personal history puts them in a higher-than-average risk category. This is no change to current practice. They are advised to continue to have regular mammograms.

Clients with BI-RADS category C breast density are advised to see a GP **only** if they have questions or concerns. They are advised to continue to have regular mammograms.

Clients with BI-RADS category D breast density are advised to see a GP for a risk assessment.

GPs will can access a webinar recording on the BreastScreen Victoria website and can call **8843 0029** with any questions relating to breast density.

What are recommended options for patients with dense breasts?

Breast density should be considered in the context of a patient's overall risk, not in isolation. You may wish to use a risk tool such as [iPrevent](http://iprevent.net.au) (iprevent.net.au) or the [Tyrer-Cuzick](http://ibis-risk-calculator.magview.com) (ibis-risk-calculator.magview.com) model to facilitate a discussion with your patient. While some risk factors are not modifiable, GPs are key in supporting patients to reduce their risk with sustained lifestyle modifications.

While high breast density can reduce the visibility of cancers on a mammogram, mammograms still detect the majority of cancers in people with high breast density. High breast density alone does not necessarily mean a patient needs additional imaging.

There are a range of options for enhanced surveillance for patients with high breast density including MRI, ultrasound, tomosynthesis or contrast enhanced mammography. These should be considered in the context of the patient's other breast cancer risk factors, personal circumstances and preferences. These supplementary tests are not currently funded as part of the BreastScreen Victoria program, however, some patients may wish to access them privately.

Book at
breastscreen.org.au
or call **13 20 50**

TTY **13 36 77** if you have hearing
or speech difficulties



For more information or to change your details,
visit **breastscreen.org.au** or call **13 20 50**



For interpreter assistance, call **13 14 50**



Translated information:
breastscreen.org.au/translations



BreastScreen Victoria acknowledges the
support of the Victorian Government.