

## Joint Media Release

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### **Canberra Airport and Cancer Council ACT pave the way for accessibility with security training**

Cancer Council ACT has delivered first-of-its-kind training with Canberra Airport on breast prostheses and security screening processes. This positive start will see Canberra Airport continue to explore how they can best accommodate medical considerations and hidden disabilities regarding the implementation of the new scanning technology.

Canberra Airport is one of the first in Australia to have upgraded their scanning technology since the mandate was announced by the Australian Government to move from metal detector scanners to full body scanners that use nonionising millimetre-wave imaging.

Michael Thomson, Head of Aviation said, "As we have implemented the new scanning technology, we have become aware of many considerations around supporting those with medical concerns and hidden disabilities. Working with Cancer Council ACT on the breast prostheses training was a great start, and we were pleased to have several of our staff undertake this. We are looking into how we best continue this and are in discussion with various disability associations on broader training and developing our disabilities program."

The new body scanning technology at Canberra Airport detects foreign items worn on the body, under clothing. For people who have undergone breast cancer surgery, they have found that the new scanners have picked up their breast prostheses. This requires them to undertake an additional secondary screening process which includes handheld security devices. A private room is offered at the start the secondary screening process.

Cancer Council ACT saw this as an opportunity to support and enhance the experiences of cancer survivors when travelling. The training was designed to provide education to security staff about cancer patients and breast cancer, and to improve skills when dealing with people affected by cancer who may be wearing prostheses (also known as breast forms).

Cancer Council ACT worked with ACT Breast Care Nurse Karen McKinnon of Calvary Hospital and Gillian Horton, owner of Colleen's Lingerie and Swimwear and breast cancer survivor, in producing the training.

For many cancer patients, public security scanning can be an anxious experience due to trauma from past medical scans and treatment. People with medical considerations and hidden disabilities, such as those wearing breast prostheses, may also feel that their privacy regarding their condition is affected.

Gillian Horton is a breast cancer survivor and uses a breast prosthesis after having a single mastectomy as part of her treatment. For Gillian airport security scanners generate a sense of anxiety with consideration of her cancer treatment and breast prosthesis.

Gillian stated, "I remember the first time I was asked to go through one of the full body scanners, I could feel a panic attack coming on. Part of it was from the history of having been through so many scanning machines throughout treatment, and concerns around that. I found the more I was waiting the more anxious I was getting and really had to focus on my breathing. Also, a lot of what women are concerned about is their privacy."

“It has been exciting to be part of the training, and to realise that my own experience was important. The training is important for that understanding. It’s the language that is used that may or may not help. It’s also essential for security staff to be aware of what a breast prosthesis looks like.”

Cancer Council ACT CEO Verity Hawkins says, “An important part of this training is about educating the various security staff at an airport about how communication and respect can support cancer patients, and others with devices or prostheses.”

“We are pleased that we have been able to respond to this issue and have recently delivered three training sessions with Canberra Airport and have planned ahead for continuous refresher training sessions.”

“Feedback on this training was excellent and engagement noticeably increased throughout the sessions. We strongly feel that there is the potential to roll out this training to all airports across the country.”

For people travelling with medical considerations or disabilities, please advise security staff if you have concerns and need further assistance so they can support your needs.

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## **Cancer Council ACT**

Cancer Council ACT is a non-government not-for-profit community organisation that aims to promote a healthier community by reducing the incidence and impact of cancer in the ACT region.

Through the generosity of the Canberra community, we provide support for those living with cancer, invest in research and promote prevention towards our vision of a cancer free future.

Head to the website to find out more about Cancer Council ACT: <https://actcancer.org/>

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### **Case Study – Gillian Horton, Colleen’s Lingerie and Swimwear**

Gillian was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008, at age 48 after a routine mammogram. She underwent surgery as part of her treatment, initially having a lumpectomy, of which the margins weren’t clear, resulting in the need to undergo a single mastectomy, followed by chemotherapy.

At the time of her surgery a breast reconstruction wasn’t an option for Gillian, so she went to *Colleen’s Lingerie* for a breast prosthesis (also known as a breast form).

In 2014 Colleen Findley decided to retire and her business 'Collen's' went up for sale. As a customer, Gillian saw this opportunity and knew that it was what she wanted to be doing. Gillian now runs *Colleen's Lingerie & Swimwear* with her expert staff, supporting women in Canberra by providing a range of lingerie, swimwear, breast prostheses, wigs and accessories.

Cancer Council ACT saw an opportunity to develop training for security and airport staff around breast cancer, breast prostheses and how to support patients during their security scans. Cancer Council ACT initially partnered with Breast Care at Calvary Hospital to help develop the training. As soon as Breast Care nurse Karen McKinnon knew that breast forms were involved, she immediately thought "Gillian is going to be the best to explain the different types of breast forms."

When Karen brought Gillian into the training development, she knew of her history of breast cancer, but was unaware of just how personal this training was to be for Gillian.

"When Karen from Breast care at calvary called me, I knew I wanted to be involved."

"I remember the first time I was asked to go through one of the full body scanners, I could feel a panic attack coming on. I found the more I was waiting the more anxious I was getting and really had to focus on my breathing."

On an overseas trip Gillian was directed to go through a 3D full body scanner, but her anxiety around using the machine stopped her short. After waiting for a supervisor Gillian tried to explain what was happening, without fully understanding it herself. She was able to eventually have a pat down search conducted.

"Part of it was from the history of having been through so many scanning machines throughout treatment, and concerns around that. The supervisor tried to calm me by saying that there's no research to say that this is going to harm you and I'm just trying not to have a meltdown."

"It's been 14 years since my treatment, and the scanners at the airport are still a trigger for my cancer anxieties."

"I work with women going through their own cancer journey all the time and am fine. But as soon as I go to any airport, I look at that scanner and the anxiety starts."

"A lot of what women are concerned about is also their privacy. Many travel with friends or work colleagues who may not know they had a diagnosis or wear a breast prosthesis and they need to explain why they get stopped."

"It has been exciting to be part of the training, and to realise that my own experience was important, as there were a lot of questions around that. It helped me immensely on a personal level."

"The training is important for that understanding. It's the language that is used that may or may not help. Also, it's essential for security staff to be aware of what a breast prosthesis looks like."

"Talking about this will also create awareness for the general public to understand what these women may be going through, the anxiety element and potential triggers."

"For me personally, and for a lot of women I know, it is going to make a massive difference."

"If I can make a difference for other women and share my experience, that's absolutely what I want to do."