

The Honourable Bridget Archer MP
Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Wellbeing
Minister for Ageing
Parliament House
Hobart TAS 7000

Dear Minister,

BreastScreen reminder arrangements for women aged over 75

COTA Tasmania is writing to urge the Tasmanian Government to review BreastScreen Tasmania's reminder arrangements for women aged 75 years and over, and to consider a leadership role in advocating for change nationally.

Women aged over 75 remain eligible to access a free screening mammogram every two years, subject to their individual circumstances and informed clinical decision-making. However, unlike women aged 50–74, they do not receive routine invitations or reminders.

We understand this reflects the broader national BreastScreen approach, rather than a policy unique to Tasmania. Nevertheless, the effect is that many older women who remain eligible and wish to continue screening are left to manage the process themselves.

For some women this may be straightforward. For others, particularly those living alone, managing early cognitive decline, disability, chronic illness, limited digital access, or reduced contact with family and friends, the absence of a reminder can mean that screening is delayed or simply overlooked.

COTA Tasmania was recently contacted by the daughter of a 79-year-old woman who could not recall when her mother had last attended BreastScreen. Her mother has early dementia and other health issues. The daughter has since arranged an appointment and set a personal reminder for two years' time, but she rightly observed that many women will not have a family member available to provide that support.

The current system appears to assume that older women can, and will, independently maintain their own screening schedule indefinitely. That assumption does not sit comfortably with broader commitments to preventive health, ageing well, equitable access and person-centred care.

COTA Tasmania is not suggesting that women over 75 should automatically undergo screening irrespective of their health status, personal preferences or capacity to undertake any follow-up investigation or treatment. Those decisions should remain informed, voluntary, and appropriately supported.

However, there is a clear opportunity to preserve choice, while reducing the risk that women miss screening simply because the program has stopped contacting them.

We urge the Tasmanian Government to consider expanding the standard continuation reminder service for women aged over 75. This would come at little or no additional cost, as the system is already set up to send reminders—and consistency, rather than exclusion of older women, would be the more effective and equitable administrative approach.

Other practical options could include:

- allowing women who have previously participated in BreastScreen to elect to continue receiving reminders after age 75;
- providing accessible information to women, families, carers and aged-care providers about ongoing eligibility and how to make an appointment;
- ensuring reminder communications clearly explain that screening after 75 remains a personal choice, informed by individual health circumstances; and
- raising this issue through national BreastScreen and health-ministerial forums, with a view to establishing a consistent reminder model across Australia.

Preventive health services should become more accessible and supportive as people age, not less so.

Tasmania has an opportunity to lead on a practical reform that would support older women to make informed decisions about their health without creating a new obligation to screen.

We also seek an update on the operational status of BreastScreen Tasmania's two mobile screening buses, including the anticipated timing for the return to service of each vehicle, arrangements in place to maintain access for women in regional and rural communities while they are unavailable, and any expected impact on screening appointment availability or waiting times.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this proposal with you in your capacities as both Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing and Minister for Ageing, and would appreciate advice on whether the Government will consider changes to the current reminder arrangements in Tasmania, alongside national advocacy for a more equitable model.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brigid Wilkinson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brigid Wilkinson

Chief Executive Officer

6th July 2026