



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health**

**Chief Medical Officer**

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The claim published on 18 October 2018 in an article by Sue Dunlevy, National health correspondent, Herald Sun, that around 80 Australian women could have developed cervical cancer because of serious delays in the rollout of a national cancer screening register by Telstra Health is alarmist and false and undermines the successful implementation of the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP).

Ms Dunlevy appears to have based her assumption on the report of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit. This Committee's report said it was noted in the Explanatory Memorandum to the National Cancer Screening Register Bill 2016 "once implemented, the changes to the NCSP will prevent an additional 140 cervical cancers each year".

The statistics referred to in the explanatory memorandum for the National Cancer Screening Register Act, is from a modelled evaluation. They do not represent actual predictions for the year 2017. They represent estimates of the cumulative protective effect from regular HPV tests over a lifetime compared to the cumulative protective effect from regular Pap tests over a lifetime.

Your readers should be assured that there are no cervical screening participants whose cervical cancers would have gone undetected during the period of the delay in Register implementation. The Pap test program remained in place throughout this period. Women actively screening and due for the test, would have had the Pap test and any cervical abnormalities would have been identified and the appropriate next steps taken for further diagnosis and treatment.

The delay in the implementation NCSP would not have had any impact on the detection or incidence of cervical cancer.

Australia is one of the first countries in the world to implement the Human papillomavirus (HPV) Cervical Screening Test as part of a national population screening program. Together with vaccination, research shows that Australia leads the world toward the elimination of cervical cancer.

Since 1 December 2017 1,342,688 women have received a HPV Screening test and as at 17 October 2018 2,208,556 electronic pathology results have been received by the Register.

Yours sincerely

Professor Brendan Murphy  
Chief Medical Officer  
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