



COUNTER PART

Women supporting women with cancer

Year in Review 2019–2020

CONNECTING

SUPPORTING

INFORMING

Our activities in 2019–2020

KEY



Counterpart Resource Centre



Some of the locations where people have joined our webinars



Hospitals where Bridge of Support runs



Cancer and Wellbeing Days



Stepping into Wellness exercise programs



Locations where we have held events

‘When we connected, it is still to this day one of the best conversations I have had during this entire cancer chapter’

Renée’s story

page 14

‘I understand what really matters to her and she realises that talking to someone who has had a shared experience makes it easier’

Penny’s story page 16

‘I first encountered the wonderful work of Counterpart whilst waiting for my breast radiation session at Peter Mac, Sunshine. One of the lovely Counterpart volunteers approached me and asked, with kindness and sensitivity, if I was waiting for radiation for breast cancer.’

Julie’s story page 7

‘Being a Peer Support Volunteer is a privilege. The welcome, the support, being valued and the friendships made are wonderful.’

Trish’s story page 17

‘[Talking to Peer Support Volunteers] helped me to feel calmer and sort my emotions, mainly because I did not have to explain things and there were not millions of questions debating the medical advice’

Kate’s story page 6

‘My collaboration with Counterpart and participation in their programs has highlighted the importance of supporting women who are impacted by cancer.’

Naina Dhana

Radiation Therapist Clinical Educator, page 13

‘Having no access to a Metastatic Breast Care Nurse or a cancer support group in my rural area, the volunteers from Counterpart have been my lifeline in understanding what I’m going through’

Monica’s story page 9

‘Participating in the Feel Good exercise program helped me build confidence. I felt comfortable exercising with women who had been through the same experience; I didn’t feel different to them.’

Viola’s story page 8

Cover

Thank you to all the women who have participated in activities of Counterpart in 2019–2020. These cover photos are a snapshot of women who have used our service, volunteers, supporters, health professionals and staff.

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Acknowledge difference We recognise that every person’s experience of breast or a gynaecological cancer is different and must be seen in the broader context of their lives.

No advice We share experiences and give support, we do not give medical, legal or financial advice or counselling.

Welcoming environment We provide a welcoming, accessible and safe environment.

Encourage participation We actively encourage people to participate in the development and operation of the service.

Empower people We are committed to enhancing people’s skills and capacity to make their own informed choices.

Respect privacy We respect the privacy of people using our service.

Non-judgemental We provide information and support in a non-judgemental way.

High standards We maintain high standards in all aspects of the service and regularly evaluate the service’s relevance to consumers, its sustainability, and effectiveness.

CEO's message

Welcome to the *Year in Review* for 2019–2020 and what a year it turned out to be.

Counterpart is a service of Women's Health Victoria (WHV). In October, WHV celebrated its 25th anniversary with the launch of 25 Champions for Women, who had all made significant contributions to the work of WHV and the lives of Victorian women. Four of these amazing women were significant in the development and continued success of Counterpart – Di Missen, Belinda Astl, Judy Sammut OAM and Rhonda Cole. Their guidance, support and dedication demonstrated everything that Counterpart stands for.

By early 2020, the world had changed, and our daily lives were impacted in many ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic: a truly global issue with local relevance. We have seen firsthand its devastating impact on women across Victoria. Gender inequality has been exacerbated and women have been severely impacted economically, socially and psychologically.

While lockdown measures were designed to keep us all safe and get the pandemic under control, they reduced face-to-face connections between families, friends, colleagues and support services like Counterpart. This made finding innovative ways of creating and sustaining connections between women with cancer and Counterpart especially important.

As you read through the *Year in Review*, you will find remarkable stories of resilience, flexibility, innovation and care, and see how Counterpart has continued to support women during this period. Many women have commented on how important our peer support calls and online events have been in reducing isolation during these times.

I'd like to thank the staff, volunteers and session presenters for their dedication and commitment during this challenging time. Their willingness to embrace new ideas and find creative solutions enabled our vital work to continue. I'd also like to thank the Victorian Government for their ongoing commitment to Counterpart, Pink Affair for funding Stepping into Wellness and LUCRF Super Community Program for funding our expansion of telehealth services. I also thank the many service providers we work with and women themselves for trusting us and connecting with our unique peer support service.

As I write this, the future remains uncertain and the pandemic recovery will be different for everyone. We will continue to talk with women and health professionals to make sure we are meeting the needs of women with cancer. Some of our face-to-face programs will return and some of our new online activities will become embedded in our services.

No matter what the future holds, Counterpart will continue to strive to connect, support and inform Victorian women with cancer to live well.



Dianne Hill
CEO, Women's Health Victoria



Women's Health Victoria Champions for Women: four Counterpart champions

Di Missen – the original manager of BreaCan, the service that became Counterpart.

Belinda Astl – a psychologist who has volunteered her time to provide direction and support to the volunteer peer support program.

Judy Sammut – a visionary of the benefits of exercise after cancer and Feel Good exercise instructor for over 15 years.

Rhonda Cole – one of the first intake of Peer Support Volunteers and still volunteering.

whv.org.au/champions-for-women



Counterpart's Champions for Women.
(L-R) Rhonda, Judy, Belinda and Di at the Women's Health Victoria Annual General Meeting, 28 October 2019.

Manager's message

The theme for our *Year in Review 2019–2020* is connection – probably more important than ever with bushfires and now a pandemic making us realise how important our communities are in providing support across all aspects of our lives. At Counterpart, we know that women supporting other women with cancer is a very powerful connection. We thank our volunteers for providing a 'listening ear', and for their empathy and dedication to other women with cancer.

Our connections with health professionals – who let women know about our service and who present at our events – are also vital to the credibility and visibility of Counterpart. Thank you for all you do to support and promote our service.

We are also grateful to the women who have shared their experiences of our service in the wonderful stories on the following pages. Your words inspire other women to try our programs and services. Thank you for your generosity and honesty.

To all those who make donations to Counterpart, both large and small, thank you. You have helped us to further support women with breast or a gynaecological cancer. In particular, we thank Pink Affair for their continuing support of the Stepping into Wellness exercise program. We are excited to be trialling a program delivered via Zoom later in 2020, with women from rural and regional Victoria getting priority access.

We also thank LUCRF Super Community Program for their incredible support of Counterpart and our timely project to improve telehealth infrastructure.

Thank you to our staff team for their commitment and resilience in an ever-changing environment while focusing so completely on supporting women with cancer. Thank you also to our colleagues at Women's Health Victoria and the Counterpart Advisory Group.

We look forward to incorporating the new ways of providing information and support we have developed this year, while never underestimating the importance of women physically coming together and sharing their experiences. As we adapt to life incorporating COVID-19, we will continue to connect women with breast or a gynaecological cancer with our unique message of hope.



Fiona McRae
Manager, Counterpart

Counterpart Advisory Group Chair's message

The Counterpart Advisory Group brings together women with expertise and experience in cancer to assist Counterpart to achieve its strategic goals. This external lens brings great knowledge of both the personal experience of cancer and the cancer service system to the work of Counterpart. The breadth of experience and connections these women bring to the Advisory Group assist Counterpart to better understand and navigate the cancer sector and enhance the reach of Counterpart to more Victorian women with breast or a gynaecological cancer. I extend my sincere appreciation to all members for their willingness to generate and discuss ideas about ways for Counterpart to improve opportunities for women to connect with this essential service.

Thank you also to the health professionals and hospitals who support the work of Counterpart by referring women to the service and providing events, such as webinars in your local communities. Without your dedication to your patients, Counterpart would not be able to reach and offer support to the women you care for. Other partnerships that extend support to women and cancer include Pink Affair for funding the Stepping into Wellness program and LUCRF Super Community Program for their support of our digital and telehealth program. These partnerships are integral to the ongoing work of Counterpart.

On behalf of the Advisory Group, I would like to sincerely thank the Counterpart team of staff and volunteers who continue to focus on the fundamental message of Counterpart – even as we live through a global pandemic – to connect, support and inform women with breast or a gynaecological cancer so they can live well.



Christine Evelyn
Chair, Counterpart
Advisory Group



Peer support

The special connection between women affected by cancer underpins every aspect of our service. Counterpart's unique peer support program has women who have experienced a breast or gynaecological cancer diagnosis use their experience to support others.

Counterpart Peer Support Volunteers listen. They can provide emotional support, understanding and hope, or help find reliable, evidence-based information. They respond to each service user's individual needs.

Every Peer Support Volunteer has gone through a selection process and participated in a training program with qualified presenters. They are all skilled and empathic women who work closely with Counterpart staff members to ensure that quality support is provided.

Since COVID-19 restrictions started, many of our volunteers have been able to make phone calls to women from home, supported by staff who are running a virtual Counterpart Resource Centre. Our volunteers' resilience and adaptability ensured that the service could continue to provide support to women affected by cancer.



Kate's story

At 37, I received the shocking news 'you have cancer'. My life had not prepared me for this; none of my peers had breast cancer. Suddenly, I was going through something that my friends and relatives could not relate to and did not understand. My husband and I had to make sudden decisions about life that most of our friends will never have to make.

I found myself needing someone to talk to: someone who could relate. Counterpart put me in contact with women who had cancer, some as younger women and mothers of young children. The conversations and interactions with the peer support services helped me to feel calmer and sort my emotions, mainly because I did not have to explain things and there were not millions of questions debating the medical advice. The conversations made me realise that I was not alone and that it was okay to take some time for myself. Finding time for myself was something I often overlooked as the mother of a toddler.

The information and support I gained through my involvement with Counterpart helped to sort the facts about breast cancer from the fiction. Following my chemotherapy, I visited Counterpart in the city and had a reflexology session; it was lovely to meet some of the dedicated people that had been such an ear and sounding board during these hard times. As we head into these extremely physically isolating times, it's lovely to continue to have the support from other women who've been on this journey too.

Supporting women with advanced/metastatic cancer

Living with cancer that has spread to another part of the body can be very different to living with early stage disease. Counterpart, guided by Peer Support Volunteers who are living with advanced/metastatic cancer, provides support and information specific to the needs of women living with this diagnosis. Peer Support Volunteers will listen empathically, provide emotional and practical support, and help women to find information they are seeking.

A separate program of events called Making Connections provides additional connection and support.

'Peer support is the one thing we can't provide as health professionals, and it can make such a difference to a woman's whole outlook as she goes through treatment. It's something I offer to every woman in my care.'

Monique Baldacchino, Breast Care Nurse,
The Royal Women's Hospital

'Meeting other women who also had cancer made me feel less scared, as I realised I was not the only person in this situation.'

Massiny, Counterpart service user

Bridge of Support

Now in its tenth year, Bridge of Support has continued to connect women having treatment at hospital with community-based support. Peer Support Volunteers see women at the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the Royal Melbourne and Royal Women's hospitals) and Sunshine Hospital. They provide support and reassurance to women having cancer treatment, and link women to other support options which can continue once discharged from hospital.

Bridge of Support began as a pilot project for women with breast cancer. In September 2019, we launched an extension of Bridge of Support to women with gynaecological cancers at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Counterpart now supports any woman with breast or a gynaecological cancer across the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre and Sunshine Hospital.

Bridge of Support programs have been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are working with health professionals at our partner hospitals to ensure that women can speak with a Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer if they choose. A simple online referral allows busy doctors, nurses and other professionals to quickly refer women for peer support.



Bridge of Support is launched for gynaecological cancer patients at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, September 2019. (L-R) Esther Lim, Manager Wellbeing and Peer Support, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre; Kellie Holland and Wendy Pullan, Counterpart staff; Margaret and Rhonda, Counterpart Peer Support Volunteers.

Next steps

- Bridge of Support will resume seeing women in hospital when COVID-19 restrictions end and it is safe for patients and volunteers.
- At Sunshine Hospital, Bridge of Support will also connect with women undergoing treatment for gynaecological cancers.

Julie's story

I first encountered the wonderful work of Counterpart whilst waiting for my breast radiation session at Peter Mac, Sunshine. One of the lovely Counterpart volunteers approached me and asked, with kindness and sensitivity, if I was waiting for radiation for breast cancer. We started chatting, she gave a brochure and my relationship with Counterpart began.

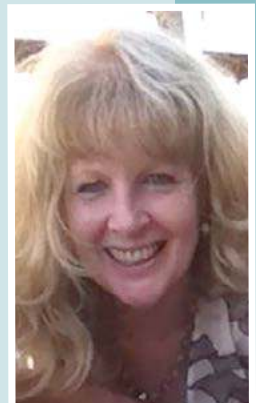
After I finished my radiation, I thought I'd attend a very popular complementary therapies day. We were treated to a relaxing reiki session and a wonderful reflexology massage. I also loved the tai chi session, and when, as a group, we talked about diet, herbs and complementary treatments. You could participate as little or as much as you wanted to,

and there was plenty of time to chat to other attendees, volunteers and staff from Counterpart over a cuppa.

It was a great day.

I've also attended a Qi gong session. A very experienced teacher gently took us through a number of movements explaining their wonderful names and benefits as we went. I continue to practise at home (lots of lessons on YouTube) and find it very beneficial.

At the end of 2019, I was lucky enough to get to the end of year morning tea at the historic QV site. It was lovely to catch up with staff and other familiar faces, and was a great way to end a very trying year.





Exercise

With exercise increasingly becoming an essential part of recovery following cancer treatment, Counterpart has continued to provide two programs that offer women an option to start exercising in a safe and supportive environment.

With approval from their medical team, women at least eight weeks post-surgery get the chance to exercise with guidance from certified fitness instructors and support of other women who have experienced cancer.

Counterpart's exercise programs were suspended from March 2020 due to COVID-19, but will resume when it is safe to do so.

Feel Good

This free fortnightly program has been running since 2003, thanks to the tireless efforts of volunteer instructor Judy and support volunteer Meril. Women can enrol in the program at any time, and improve their confidence, mobility and wellbeing by attending sessions held at Genesis Fitness in Melbourne's CBD.

Stepping into Wellness

With the generous support of Pink Affair, this free six-week program is held in community locations across Melbourne. Stepping into Wellness gives participants a chance to increase fitness, gain motivation and connect to ongoing exercise programs in their local areas.

Now in its sixth year, Stepping into Wellness ran three successful programs in the second half of 2019. These were held in Chirnside Park, Craigieburn and Hopper's Crossing.



Next steps

- Pink Affair have agreed to fund an online pilot of Stepping into Wellness, aimed at women living in rural and regional areas. This will run at the end of 2020.
- Feel Good and Stepping into Wellness will resume when it is safe for participants, volunteers and instructors.

Stepping into Wellness participants in Hopper's Crossing, November 2019.



Viola's story

When I was first recovering from cancer I felt scared to meet other people. Participating in the Feel Good exercise program helped me build confidence. I felt comfortable exercising with women who had been through the same experience; I didn't feel different to them. Everyone was so warm and welcoming. I even had coffee with some of the other participants.

I feel very grateful for the support Counterpart has given me in my transition to the new, calmer and more focused person I am today. I recall one day, when I did not have much energy, I received a phone call from a very kind Peer Support Volunteer. These women have such caring hearts. The volunteer I spoke with listened and provided the comfort and encouragement I really needed at that time. I now look forward with a new perspective; I am taking time to look after myself so that I can help others. I keep active with tai chi and running, and am learning new computer skills as I plan to volunteer. I am so thankful to Counterpart for providing this support. It is so valuable to me and other women in similar situations.



Supporting women across Victoria

Counterpart has continued to strengthen relationships with service providers in rural, regional and outer-metropolitan areas and provide support and information to women across Victoria.

In 2019, two Victorian Government-funded projects were completed. The Rural and Regional Project, and the Area-based Project helped us reach more women affected by breast or a gynaecological cancer.

These projects included working closely with health professionals to increase awareness of Counterpart's services, and running events and webinar screenings in partnership with local health services.

See pages 12 to 14 for more about the range of webinar screenings and wellness-focused events across the Eastern

and Southern regions of Melbourne, and regional centres. A number of webinar screenings could not run due to the widely-reported cyberhacking incidents in Barwon South Western and Gippsland regions, however our partnerships with service providers in these areas lay a solid foundation for future collaboration.

As Counterpart has moved many group activities online during the COVID-19 pandemic, women who live further from Melbourne have had the opportunity to participate in a range of webinars and online workshops.

Counterpart Peer Support Volunteers Margaret and Glenda at the Great South Coast Community Cancer Expo, Warrnambool, October 2019.



Next steps

- Connect with Victorian health professionals to develop more collaborative events for women living with breast or a gynaecological cancer.
- Ask rural and regional women what webinars and online events they would like to attend.

Monica's story

Thirteen years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had a lumpectomy, lymph nodes removed, followed by chemotherapy, radiotherapy and took tamoxifen for almost five years. Unfortunately, in January 2018, I was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer.

Having no access to a Metastatic Breast Care Nurse or a cancer support group in my rural area, the volunteers from Counterpart have been my lifeline in understanding what I'm going through. Some of the things that were helpful for me to talk about were the isolation, loneliness and not having any support for those days when I felt so alone or unwell. Also, being told about events and resources that I could access through Counterpart. I always felt supported, understood, and that I could talk about anything without being judged. The volunteers are always happy to receive a call from you if you feel the need to talk to someone who truly understands.

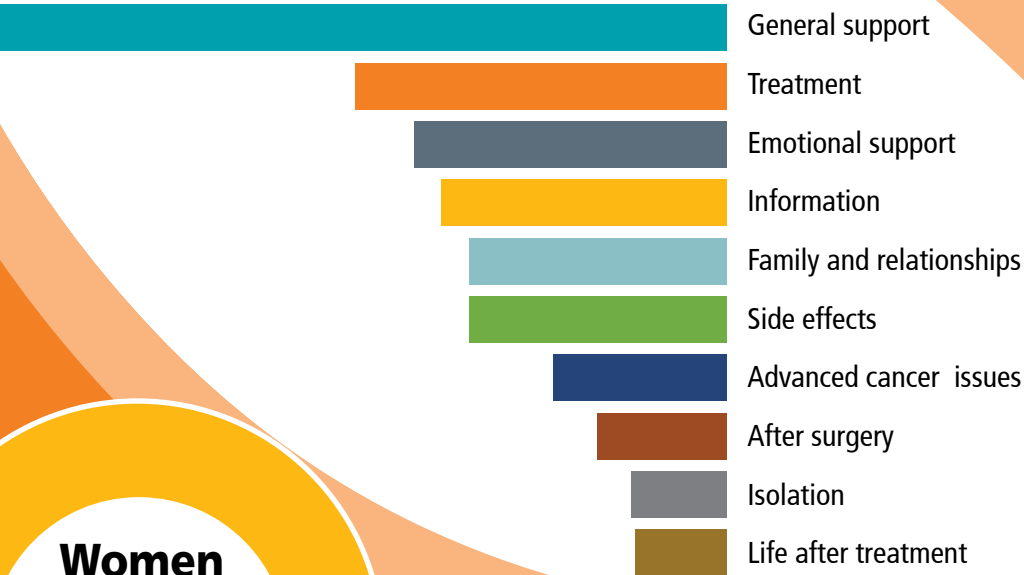
The most valuable things I have gained from my experiences with the Counterpart team are the ongoing support (from women who have gone through a similar situation), the care that is given, new information that is provided that I would not have otherwise known and, most of all, the wonderful friendships I have made with people that truly understand and care.

Counterpart acknowledges that Monica died in February 2020. We offer our condolences to Monica's family and thank them for allowing us to share her beautifully-written story.



2019–2020 at a glance

Peer support
Top 10 topics discussed



2211 interactions with people affected by breast or a gynaecological cancer

882 women used the service



Activity	Hours
Providing peer support, including Bridge of Support	1416
Assisting with events and exercise programs	159
Library and mail-outs	323
Professional development	136



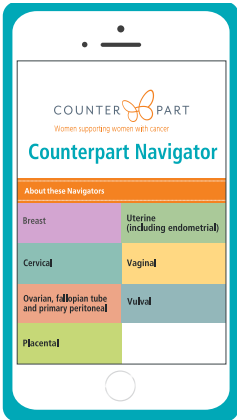
88% have been diagnosed with breast cancer
not advanced
advanced

12% have been diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer
not advanced
advanced

18% have identified that they are living with an advanced/metastatic diagnosis.

Top 5 languages spoken (after English)
(Where language has been reported)

Vietnamese
Greek
Italian
Spanish
Turkish



Information

Navigator

2571 times Counterpart Navigator was used.

30% using a computer or laptop and 70% using a mobile device.

Events

Webinars and online workshops

20 webinars and online workshops held

Most attended webinars
Emotional load of metastatic cancer
Cancer fatigue and sleep
Cognitive effects of cancer treatment
Lymphoedema
Treatments for metastatic breast cancer

1042 Past webinars viewed on our website

Face to face events (July to March)

59 events

29 exercise sessions
4 wellbeing days
7 rural webinar viewing events
8 other events in community locations
11 city-based events

Connecting

Mailing list 5035 total

4125 women with cancer
910 health professionals

Social media
Facebook likes 550
Twitter followers 368



Belly dancing (Berwick) Charni Pilkington, Happy Hips Bellydance. *In partnership with St John of God Berwick Hospital*

City street photography Marion Vincent, Photographer

Collage art Jackie Burden, Art Therapist

Creative journalling (Ringwood East) Sandra Buchanan, Art Therapist and Counsellor. *In partnership with Eastern Health*

Dietary changes and cancer treatment (Altona) Coralie Lowe, Nutritionist and Home Economist

Feldenkrais Thalia Castles, Feldenkrais Practitioner

It's in the genes (Frankston) Dr Yoland Antill, Medical Oncologist, Peninsula Health. *In partnership with Peninsula Health, Frankston Hospital*

Webinars and online workshops

Cancer and bone health Dr le-Wen Sim, Endocrinologist, Western Health

- **Webinar screened in Geelong.** *In partnership with Barwon Health*

- **Webinar screened in Wonthaggi.** *In partnership with Bass Coast Health Wonthaggi & the Bass Coast Breast Cancer Support Group*

Cancer, fatigue and sleep (Maryborough) Dr Elizabeth Pearson, Allied Health Researcher, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. *In partnership with Ballarat Health Services and Maryborough District Health Service*

Chair yoga Sarasvati Sally Dawson, Yoga and Meditation Teacher

Cognitive effects of cancer treatment Dr Adrian Schembri, Director of Clinical Science, Cogstate

- **Webinar screened in Geelong.** *In partnership with Barwon Health*

- **Webinar screened in Wonthaggi.** *In partnership with Bass Coast Health Wonthaggi & the Bass Coast Breast Cancer Support Group*

Feldenkrais Sally Low, Feldenkrais Practitioner and Physiotherapist, Salamander Centre

Lymphoedema Helen Eason, Physiotherapist

Managing menopause: a naturopathic approach Sandra Villella, Naturopath, Jean Hailes for Women's Health

Meditation and yoga in the East (Lilydale) Sarasvati Sally Dawson, Yoga and Meditation Teacher. *In partnership with Eastern Health, Yarra Ranges Health*

Qi gong Dorota Swiderski, Qi gong Practitioner

Restorative yoga Loretta Leigh, Reflexologist and Yoga Instructor

Sashiko Lea O'Sullivan, Kimono House

Shrinking the worries Lynda Evans, Social Worker

Styling headwear with confidence Nicole Mallalieu, Designer and author

Tai chi for women with gynaecological cancer (Box Hill) Catriona Wells, Celestial Tai Chi College. *In partnership with Eastern Health*

Thinking positive: benefit or burden? Andrea Murphy, Family Support Team Leader, Peninsula Home Hospice

Young women's breakfast (Bendigo) Greta, Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer. *In partnership with Bendigo Health*

Medical acupuncture Dr Rebecca Chapman, Staff Specialist in Palliative Medicine and Medical Oncology, Bendigo Health

Meditation Matt Young, Melbourne Meditation Centre

Mindfulness Suzanne Peyton, Mindfulness Teacher, The Mindful Well

- **Mindfulness and tai chi (Bendigo)** Webinar screening and presentation by Katie Sutton, Exercise Physiologist, St John of God Bendigo. *In partnership with St John Of God Bendigo*

Qi gong (three workshops) Dorota Swiderski, Qi gong Practitioner

Radiotherapy for breast cancer Kerryn Brown, Radiation Therapist and Naina Dhana, Radiation Therapist Clinical Educator, Austin Health

Radiotherapy for gynaecological cancer Sylvia Hanna, Senior Brachytherapist and Naina Dhana, Radiation Therapist Clinical Educator, Austin Health

Self care and return to work Michelle Irving, Survivorship Coach

Shrink your worries! Lynda Evans, Social Worker

Sleeping soundly webinar screening and facilitated discussion (Geelong) Anne-Marie McCarthy, Psychologist, Barwon Health *In partnership with Barwon Health*

Living with cancer and wellbeing day for women with a gynaecological cancer (Heidelberg)

Sandra Buchanan, Counsellor and Creative Arts Therapist
Sian Cole, Health Psychologist, Austin Health
Swami Karunananda, Yoga and Meditation Teacher
Jane Power, Regional Coordinator, Survivors Teaching Students
Jo Power, Consultant Psychiatrist, Mercy Health
Kelly Spence, Exercise Physiologist, EX-MED Cancer
In partnership with Mercy Hospital for Women and Ovarian Cancer Australia

Living with metastatic breast cancer (Heidelberg)

Kristen Capron, Oncology Physiotherapist, Austin Health
Swami Karunananda, Yoga and Meditation Teacher
Tamsin Nichols, Social Worker, Austin Health
Dr Belinda Yeo, Oncologist, Olivia Newton-John Cancer Wellness and Research Centre (ONJCWRC) *In partnership with ONJCWRC and Austin Health breast care nurses*

Cancer and wellbeing day (Brighton)
Dr Yoland Antill, Medical Oncologist, Cabrini Health
Lisa Campbell, Feldenkrais Practitioner and Physiotherapist
Sarasvati Sally Dawson, Yoga and Meditation Teacher
Ashleigh Mosele, Clinical Dietitian, Cabrini Health
Judy Sammut, Exercise Instructor
In partnership with Cabrini Health

Cancer and wellbeing day (Mornington)
Jennifer Baker, Exercise Physiologist, Bebetter health
Andrea Beeston, Reflexologist
Felicity Carson, Breast Care Nurse and Meditation Practitioner
Kate Tremlett, Feldenkrais Practitioner and Physiotherapist
Jacqui van Weel, Open Sky Qigong
Bernadette Voss, Reflexologist

Meet the researcher Dr Sophie Lewis, Senior Research Fellow, University of New South Wales

Webinars

Emotional load of metastatic cancer Dr Dani Bullen, Clinical Psychologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Exercise and metastatic cancer: a practical approach Dr Amy Dennett, Physiotherapist and Research Translation Fellow, Eastern Health

Treatments for metastatic breast cancer Dr Michelle White, Medical Oncologist, Monash Health, Cabrini Health

Events and wellbeing days

Increasingly, women access information online, however many still relish the chance to come together to meet and learn from others as well.

Four Cancer and Wellbeing Days were a highlight of the last year. These events were run in Mornington, Brighton and Heidelberg (one at the Mercy Hospital and one at the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Wellness and Research Centre). They were praised by participants for the opportunity to meet other women affected by cancer, the quality information presented and the introduction to different wellbeing practices.

Two of these events were for women who have less access to support: women living with advanced/metastatic cancer and women diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer. Thank you to our partners for their work in supporting these events.

Our What's On and Making Connections programs also included a range of informative, creative and wellbeing-focused events in Melbourne's CBD, Altona, Berwick, Frankston, Lilydale and Ringwood. We also held events with our partners in regional Victoria, with events, including webinar screenings, in Bendigo, Geelong, Maryborough and Wonthaggi.

Participants connect over lunch at the Living with cancer and wellbeing day, at the Mercy Hospital for Women, Heidelberg, March 2020.



'[The highlight of the day was] connecting with other women who have had breast cancer. Also meeting the wonderful staff of Counterpart and Cabrini.'

Participant at the Cancer and wellbeing day, Brighton, November 2019.



Naina Dhana

**Radiation Therapist Clinical Educator,
Austin Health**

Throughout my career in radiation therapy over the last 37 years, I have seen the impact of the diagnosis of cancer. Cancer impacts so many facets of the patient's life and I truly believe that through supportive care we can make the experience of cancer and its treatment so much more bearable. My collaboration with Counterpart and participation in their programs has highlighted to me, the importance of supporting women who are impacted by cancer.

Providing evidence-based information and presenting treatment options in a simple, understandable language enables women to know that they are understood and that we are here for them during the challenges that they face. With the support of my colleagues we have presented two webinars, assisted with the Navigator app and will continue to support women in the future through continued collaboration with a service that supports women diagnosed with cancer.



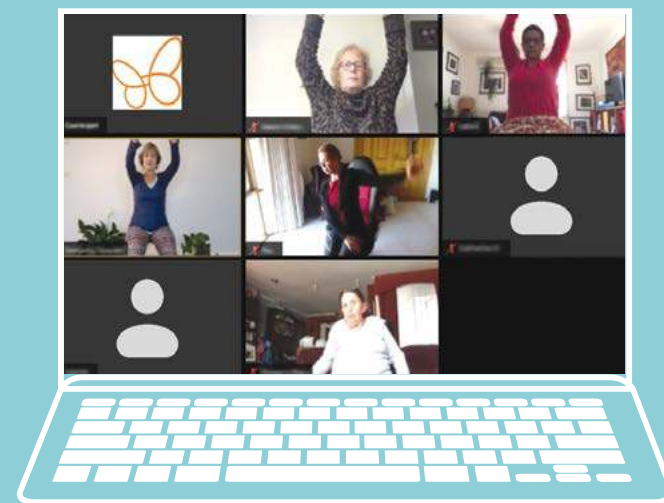


Webinars and online sessions

Webinars continue to be an essential part of Counterpart's work. They allow women to hear from and ask questions of experienced and qualified presenters on a range of topics relevant to them, no matter where they live. In 2019–2020, Counterpart offered even more webinars, utilising the telehealth facilities and staff skills acquired during the Telehealth Project funded by LUCRF Super Community Program.

Health professionals continued to partner with us to host webinars in regional and outer-metropolitan areas. These hosted webinars bring local women together to watch the webinar, discuss the content and benefit from meeting and supporting each other.

Most webinars are also recorded and available to watch on our website. These are an invaluable resource for many women who may be seeking information at a particular time in their cancer experience, or who weren't able to attend the webinar.



Chair yoga, online workshop facilitated by Sarasvati Sally Dawson, June 2020.

In April 2020, Counterpart held our first online workshop – Qi gong. This was followed by Meditation, two more Qi gong sessions, Feldenkrais, Self care and return to work, and Chair yoga. With many women feeling even more isolated during the pandemic, these events have been successful, with 100 per cent of women saying they would be interested in attending another.

Renee's story

Initially feeling I didn't need what I saw as additional support at the start of my cervical cancer chapter, I had the presence of mind to hold onto any collateral given to me. After my treatment, months later trawling through social media, a cervical cancer post I read brings me undone. I then opened my file of saved collateral and came across Counterpart.

When we connected, it is still to this day one of the best conversations I have had during this entire cancer chapter. To relate to someone through a similar cancer journey was pure elation as they understood everything I was conveying.

I felt justified and heard. My rationality was brought back into line and I had sense in my world again.

From here I have continued to gain support from Counterpart via a recent webinar which again gave me inner peace and strength as I plan my return to the working world. Being able to contact and access Counterpart remotely is a huge plus for those of us regionally. Their support and resources are invaluable when you find yourself in need.

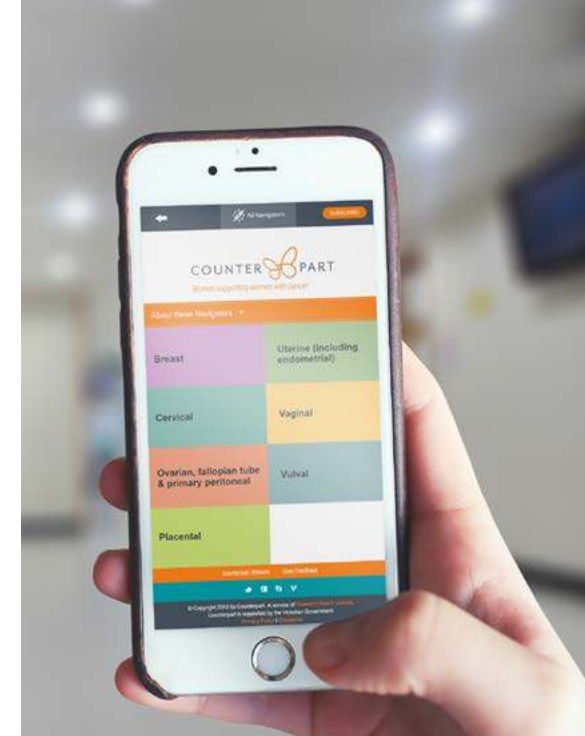


Counterpart Navigator

The Counterpart Navigator is an online resource to help women find their way to reliable, evidence-based information. All resources included on the Navigator have been reviewed by qualified Australian health professionals and women who have experienced a cancer diagnosis.

Following the launch of the cervical, ovarian, placental, uterine, vaginal and vulval cancer Navigators in 2018, an evaluation of the tool was completed in November 2019 by researchers from Deakin University. This showed almost 90 per cent of women who had used the app were satisfied with it. A number of improvements to performance, including loading times, have already been implemented as a result of the evaluation.

Access the Counterpart Navigator at counterpart.org.au/navigator.



Next steps

- Counterpart is seeking funding for a metastatic breast cancer Navigator. This addition will provide much needed access to information for women with this diagnosis. The Counterpart Navigator currently includes information for early breast cancer and all stages of gynaecological cancers.
- Promote the Navigator to women with cancer and health professionals as a credible hub for information.

Supporting women through telehealth

The Telehealth Project was funded by LUCRF Super Community Program and expanded our capacity to support women across Victoria. To mark the completion of the program, we held a morning tea in October 2019 with all who had been involved in this project. Representatives from Women's Health Victoria, including Counterpart staff and volunteers, and LUCRF Super viewed a 'just released' video, made by LUCRF Super Community Program, celebrating the support Counterpart provides for women with cancer. Featuring women with a lived experience of breast or a gynaecological cancer, the video emphasises the unique connection between women affected by cancer.

Watch the video at counterpart.org.au/telehealth-project.

We are grateful to LUCRF Super Community Program for their support of Counterpart and women with cancer.



Telehealth Project morning tea, October 2019. (L-R: The Hon. Monica Gould, Chairperson, and Julie Warren, Director, LUCRF Super Community Program Board of Directors; Charlie Donnelly, CEO, LUCRF Super; Helen and Diana, volunteers, and Mary Macheras-Magias, staff member, Counterpart; Greg Sword AM, Project Director, LUCRF Super).



Recorded webinars

Finding information at the right time can be a challenge. That is why many women find Counterpart's recorded webinar videos helpful: they are on our website, ready to view whenever they are needed. Women can watch them to get information from expert presenters and hear the answers to other women's questions.

In 2019–2020, our recorded webinars were viewed over a thousand times. The most popular ones were:

- Treatment options for metastatic breast cancer
- Lymphoedema
- Sleeping soundly
- Peripheral neuropathy





Volunteers are the heart of Counterpart

Our volunteers are essential to every aspect of our service. They support other women affected by cancer in a myriad of ways. They also provide an essential consumer voice that helps to shape all of Counterpart's programs and ensures we remain true to our women-centred values.

As well as Peer Support Volunteers, we also have Program Volunteers who run our exercise programs, assist with mail-outs and maintain our resource library.

During the year, 66 volunteers contributed an incredible 2034 hours of their time. They have:

- provided practical and emotional support, in person and over the phone, from our Resource Centre
- provided this support over the phone from home, during the COVID-19 pandemic
- supported women at hospitals through the Bridge of Support program
- travelled to venues across Melbourne and regional centres to assist with events and promote Counterpart
- sent library resources to women and updated the library catalogue
- helped train and mentor new Peer Support Volunteers
- shared their experiences online and in videos for the Counterpart website
- participated in projects and committees to improve cancer support for others.



Volunteers (L-R) Liz, Diana and Fe at the volunteer end of year dinner.



Volunteers (L-R) Danni and Barbara assisting at our belly dance workshop.



Volunteers (L-R) Susan, Margaret, Jan and Diana at a volunteer morning tea.



Connection

My favourite part of my Counterpart day is that quiet moment before I call a stranger. I clear my mind ready to listen to her. To hear who she really is and prepare myself to connect to her world.

What follows is a deeply personal conversation. One that revolves around the effect that cancer has had on her and her family, friends, work and home life. Often medical treatments take a toll and decisions life changing. Surprisingly most conversations end in laughter.

We've discovered each other's humour. I understand what really matters to her and she realises that talking to someone who has had a shared experience makes it easier.

At the end of the conversation, I often feel like I've made a friend.

Penny, Peer Support Volunteer



Our volunteers

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered in 2019–2020. Counterpart couldn't exist without you.

Peer Support Volunteers

Ailsa	Janice	Pam
Amanda	Jenny	Pam S
Barbara	Jill	Penny
Branka	Jo	Rebecca
Bridget	Joan	Rhonda
Chris G	Khim	Sue G
Chris O	Lea	Sue S
Danni	Liz	Teresa
Denise	Lyn	Thérèse
Emma	Marcia	Trish F
Evelyn	Marg	Trish M
Glenda	Margaret	Vivienne
Greta	May	Wendy
Helen	Meri	Wilma
Isabella	Nadia	Yvonne

We remember with fondness Peer Support Volunteer Lianne, who died in September 2019.

Program Volunteers

Amy	Jan	Savi
Damien	Jaya	Susan
Diana	Lucy	Tia
Fe	Marg	

Exercise Support Volunteers

Judy
Lois
Meril

Retiring volunteers

Annette (11 years)
Lois (15 years)

NAB volunteers

We would also like to thank volunteers from the National Australia Bank for assisting us with mail-outs.

Ahmed	Johanna	Nina
Beth	Katie	Paula
Christopher	Matthew	Samantha
Claudia	Megha	Shaikh
David	Melody	Wendy
Jaclyn	Najwa	Yvonne

The 2019 intake of Peer Support Volunteers, with Counterpart staff members Kellie and Helen at the completion of their training, August 2019.

Trish's story



I first came into contact with Counterpart at the beginning of my second cancer challenge. I walked in off the street anxious and feeling like I had no control in my life. From that day I was welcomed, I felt safe and I had people who cared: people who understood what was going on for me. I felt valued. Counterpart volunteers called me throughout my treatment and after. I cannot put a price on this support. It was the one place and time where I didn't have to be strong for others (as we women tend to do). The contact with volunteers gave me strength.

Being a Peer Support Volunteer is a privilege. The welcome, the support, being valued and the friendships made are wonderful. This empowers me in my contact with those who access the service. This is what I hope I am sharing with them.



Our staff

Fiona McRae
Manager

Kellie Holland
Team Leader Operations and
Volunteer Coordinator

Tammy Boatman
Rural Programs Coordinator
and Stepping into Wellness
Coordinator (to February 2020)

Katherine Bradstreet
Communications Coordinator

Lauren Ferris
Digital Resources Coordinator

Rebecca Harraghy
Administration Officer
Acting Communications Coordinator
(July 2019 to January 2020)

Louise Knell
Bridge of Support Western
Health Coordinator

Mary Macheras-Magias
Area-based Coordinator
(to September 2019)
Casual Programs Coordinator
(from February 2020)

Wendy Pullan
Program Coordinator and Bridge
of Support VCCC Coordinator

Linda Rehill
Program and Resources Coordinator

Helen Mertin
Volunteer Training Coordinator

Lieve De Clercq
Casual Programs Coordinator



The Counterpart staff team

Counterpart Advisory Group

Christine Evelyn (Chair)
Monique Baldacchino
Danielle Carpenter
Liz Dax
Carmel McCarthy
Alison Murphy
Bernadette Zappa
Greta (Counterpart Volunteer)
Janice (Counterpart Volunteer)
Helen (from January 2020, Counterpart Volunteer)
Dianne Hill (CEO, Women's Health Victoria)
Fiona McRae (Manager, Counterpart)

Farewells

Helen Coleman (until October 2019)

Our supporters

Thank you to all the people and organisations who have supported us in 2019–2020. You make it possible for us to continue to connect, support and inform women with breast or a gynaecological cancer in Victoria to live well.

Donors

Susan Burgess
Leo Connelly
Margaret Fisher
Lyn Hunter
Bettella Macrae
Massiny Ng
Robin Pietsch
Hilla Reynolds
Elizabeth Smith
Shu-Hsin Soong
Shu-Yi Soong
There were also donors who wished to remain anonymous.

In-kind donations

Dr Yoland Antill
Andrea Beeston
Kerryn Brown
Dr Libby Blackley
Dr Dani Bullen
Lisa Campbell
Sarasvati Sally Dawson
Naina Dhana
Fernwood Fitness – Chirnside Park
Prof. Michael Green
Genevieve Green
Sylvia Hanna
Swami Karunananda
Jan Kaufman
Tennille Lewin
Dr Sophie Lewis
Rebecca Liberatore
Paul Magias
Nicole Mallalieu
Lisa Matar
Fiona Mitchell
Dr Meron Pitcher
Dr Adrian Schembri
Splash Aqua Park – Craigieburn
Kate Tremlett
Jacqui van Weel
Sandra Villella
Marion Vincent
Bernadette Voss
Catriona Wells
Dr Michelle White

Friends of Counterpart

Aquapulse – Hopper's Crossing
Arena Printing
Belinda Astl
Attractor Solutions
Rhonda Barnes

Elizabeth Black
Celestial Tai Chi
Community Data Solutions
Liz Douglass
Kaye Elias
Fernwood Fitness – Chirnside Park
Genesis Fitness
Kyna Godhani
Jo Gniel
Melissa Grenville
IT Strategic
Loretta Leigh
Beng Yan Lian
Jo Lovelock
Mezzo
National Australia Bank
Veronica Neale
Sam Burrone Design
Judy Sammut
Splash Aqua Park – Craigieburn
Michelle Taylor
Vicki White
Bernadette Zappa

Bridge of Support partners

Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
The Royal Melbourne Hospital
The Royal Women's Hospital
Western Health

Presenters

Dr Yoland Antill
Jennifer Baker
Andrea Beeston
Dr Libby Blackley
Kerryn Brown
Sandra Buchanan
Dr Dani Bullen
Jackie Burden
Lisa Campbell
Kristen Capron
Felicity Carson
Thalia Castles
Charni Pilkington
Dr Rebecca Chapman
Sian Cole
Sarasvati Sally Dawson
Dr Amy Dennett
Naina Dhana
Helen Eason
Lynda Evans
Prof. Michael Green
Sylvia Hanna
Michelle Irving

Swami Karunananda
Loretta Leigh
Tennille Lewin
Dr Sophie Lewis
Rebecca Liberatore
Sally Low
Coralie Lowe
Lisa Matar
Nicole Mallalieu
Anne Marie McCarthy
Fiona Mitchell
Ashleigh Mosele
Andrea Murphy
Tamsin Nichols
Lea O'Sullivan
Dr Elizabeth Pearson
Suzanne Peyton
Jane Power
Jo Power
Judy Sammut
Dr Adrian Schembri
Dr Le-Wen Sim
Kelly Spence
Katie Sutton
Dorota Swiderski
Kate Tremlett
Jacqui van Weel
Sandra Villella
Marion Vincent
Bernadette Voss
Catriona Wells
Dr Michelle White
Dr Belinda Yeo
Matt Young

Project funding

LUCRF Super Community Program
Pink Affair
Victorian Government



COUNTER PART

Women supporting women with cancer

☎ 1300 781 500

✉ info@counterpart.org.au

🌐 counterpart.org.au



Counterpart is a service of
Women's Health Victoria



Counterpart is supported by
the Victorian Government

Counterpart Resource Centre



Level 5, Queen Victoria Women's Centre
210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000

Postal address

GPO Box 1066, Melbourne 3001

Hours of operation

Monday	10am–5pm
Wednesday	10am–5pm
Thursday	10am–5pm

Peer support from 10am–2pm
on these days (closed public holidays)

C O N N E C T I N G | S U P P O R T I N G | I N F O R M I N G

Women's Health Victoria acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land that our offices are situated on, the peoples of the Kulin Nation. As a statewide organisation, we also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Victoria. We pay our respects to them, their cultures and their Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that we are beneficiaries of stolen land and dispossession, which began over 200 years ago and continues today.



/CounterpartSupport



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counterpart.org.au

Design: Sam Burrone Design

October 2020
Print: Arena Printing

Content: Counterpart staff