

COUNTERPART



Women supporting women with cancer

CONNECTING | SUPPORTING | INFORMING

YEAR IN REVIEW
2021–2022

Contents

Highlights

2021 – 2022

This year, we:

- consulted with cancer organisations, women with lived experience of cancer and health professionals as we prepared to expand Counterpart’s services to all women with cancer from 1 July 2022
- supported women diagnosed with breast or a gynaecological cancer over the phone, online and in person, with our Peer Support Volunteers working from the Resource Centre and making calls from home
- ran events for women with cancer, including for women living with advanced/metastatic cancer
- recruited and trained new Peer Support Volunteers, and supported our existing volunteers
- restarted our Bridge of Support program, bringing peer support to women while they are at hospital
- sent monthly newsletters promoting Counterpart’s programs, as well as research studies, services and support options from across the cancer sector
- redesigned our website after extensive consultation with women who use our service
- presented on our peer support program at the Victorian Cancer Survivorship Conference in March 2022
- collaborated with others in the sector, including participation in the development of a Uterine (Endometrial) Cancer Care Plan conducted by Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre.

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OUR SERVICE

Principles

Acknowledge difference We recognise that every person’s experience of 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

OF Country

Women’s Health Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we work on, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nations. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and acknowledge their continued Custodianship of these lands and waters. As a statewide organisation, we also acknowledge and pay our respects to the past and present Elders of Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Victoria. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that we are the beneficiaries of stolen land and dispossession, which began over 230 years ago and continues today.

Jenny’s STORY

‘I find the mind, emotions and supportive care workshops help me best as they help me manage physical treatment and side effects of metastatic breast cancer.’

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Robyn’s STORY

‘...at the time I was feeling most vulnerable, it certainly helped me and gave me a completely confidential, anonymous place where I could just be my ‘real’ self.’

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Madeleine’s STORY

‘At first, I did not like the virtual meetings, but soon I found the beauty of listening to people living too far away, whom probably I would have not had the chance to meet in person.’

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CEO's message

Dianne Hill
CEO, Women's Health Victoria

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Counterpart *Year in Review 2021–2022*. While Covid-19 continues to affect our lives, Counterpart has continued to connect, support and inform women with cancer in so many ways.

Women's Health Victoria (WHV)'s vision of women living well – healthy, empowered, equal continues to drive our policy, advocacy and delivery of services. While awareness of gender equality has increased in recent years, there is much work still to be done to achieve real and lasting change especially in areas of prevention of violence against women, mental health, sexual and reproductive health and addressing gendered inequalities in housing, employment and economic security.

Counterpart, a service of WHV, supports women at any stage of their cancer experience from diagnosis onwards. By providing a listening ear through our Peer Support Volunteers, information via our webinar program, and delivering an extensive series of therapeutic and creative activities, Counterpart supports better health outcomes for women as they go through cancer. You can read inspiring stories of how Counterpart has made a difference to the lives of women throughout the *Year in Review*.

The Victorian Cancer Plan 2020–2024 identifies priorities to improve the experience of the cancer treatment and care system and achieve equitable outcomes for all Victorians with cancer. From July 2022, Counterpart extended our services to all Victorian women with cancer to increase equity of access to supportive care services, especially for women with rare and less common cancers where little support exists. Building on the solid foundations of our Peer Support model we have worked with other cancer organisations and women with different cancers to ensure that we can provide support for all women with cancer.

Volunteers are integral to the support provided by Counterpart. Thank you for continuing to provide vital connections to other women with cancer. Your dedication and compassion in thinking about others, even as your own lives have been affected by Covid-19, is amazing. Thank you also for all the other aspects of Counterpart you get involved in – working groups, volunteer training, promotion and program improvements – all benefit from your understanding of how cancer affects women and your personal experiences of cancer.

Thank you also to our major funder, the Victorian Government, as well as our generous donors, health professionals we work with, health and wellbeing creatives who deliver our events, and our Counterpart Advisory Group members.

To the wonderful Counterpart staff team, thank you for thinking creatively about how best to support women with cancer in these challenging times and for continuing to support our amazing volunteers.

The extension of Counterpart services to all women with cancer is another defining moment in our history and will be a keyfocus of the next year. As we strengthen and build new partnerships with other cancer organisations and engage with women with other cancers, we look forward to continuing to connect, support and inform women with cancer to live well, in our twentieth year of service to the Victorian community.



Reconciliation action

Our vision for reconciliation is for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities to live well: healthy, empowered and equal, with strong connection to culture and Country. We want a just and equitable Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are treated with respect and the health system has earned their trust by addressing systemic racism, promoting cultural safety and improving service provision and accountability.

In 2021–2022, WHV has been developing our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), with input from Aboriginal women as well as Board and staff members. Through this RAP, Counterpart will work towards making our service an inclusive, safe and empowering service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with cancer.

Yakuna Gananggurr (Until Tomorrow)

WHV wanted a visual reflection of our commitment to reconciliation and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Gamilaroi woman, Madison Connors, created *Yakuna Gananggurr* for us.

You can read the story behind this beautiful artwork at: whv.org.au/about/our-commitment-towards-reconciliation



Manager's message

Fiona McRae
Manager, Counterpart

As staff, we all get really excited whenever we receive emails or feedback from women who have used Counterpart's services. Most frequently, these words are filled with gratitude and thanks, especially for the support and encouragement our Peer Support Volunteers provide. It reminds us that women with cancer remain at the centre of all we do.

Sometimes the words we receive again remind us that going through cancer is an individual process. While there are similarities, each person has their own experience, and our role is to support and encourage with respect and without judgement. Thank you to all the women who use Counterpart services as we learn and grow from every conversation we have.

Our volunteers have most of these conversations with women. Peer Support Volunteers are trained and listen, connect with, support and inform other women with

cancer. They are privy to so many details of women's lives – their families, their work, their innermost thoughts – as every area of life is impacted by a cancer diagnosis. Thank you to all our volunteers who give of their time so generously to make other women's experience of cancer less isolating.

We receive great support from so many health professionals, researchers, students and others to both promote Counterpart to women and to provide information about our services. Information about some of these projects is within these pages. Thank you to you all.

We have generous donors who contribute to Counterpart. This year, these donations were used to make our services visible to women with cancer, their carers and friends, as well as the myriad of people working in health and community services who promote our service. Thank you for your donations.

To the staff team – you are an amazing group of women. Thank you for continually thinking about and working towards ensuring all women using Counterpart services get the best experience possible.

In the year ahead we enter another exciting phase where all women with cancer can use our service. We have already met some of these women and learnt so much from them. We know this will continue as more women hear about Counterpart and join us as we connect, support and inform Victorian women with cancer to live well, however they define that for themselves.



Counterpart Advisory Group Chair's message

Christine Evely
Chair, Counterpart Advisory Group

The Counterpart Advisory Group (CAG) is a group of dedicated and committed women, some of whom have an experience of cancer. Several are health professionals, and some are interested community members. We meet four times each year to contribute our expert knowledge to assist Counterpart in providing high quality peer support and programs to Victorian women with cancer. The CAG also brings important knowledge about the health system and networks to the forefront of Counterpart's thinking about how consumers can access supportive care services. Thank you to all our members for their time and enthusiasm to support Counterpart in this way.

Zoom was again the way we communicated this year which makes attending meetings as easy as possible for this group of busy women, who volunteer their

time to Counterpart so generously. As Counterpart expands to providing services to all women with cancer, so will the CAG continue to reflect the diversity of women, cancers and health professionals by recruiting new members to the group.

On behalf of the CAG, I would like to thank all the Counterpart volunteers who continue to support other women with cancer in a variety of ways. With the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic continuing to roll through our communities, volunteering has been challenging for many people, and so I am grateful to those of you who have been able to keep supporting women experiencing cancer. Your volunteering is central to the success of Counterpart.

The future for Counterpart is exciting as women with any cancer start using the service and become involved with the various aspects of volunteering. The focus of peer support – women who have had cancer supporting other women with cancer – will remain the cornerstone of the compassionate and hopeful services provided by Counterpart.

Women Supporting Women

Peer support

'I did not know when I was diagnosed what I would need but have since found out what I needed most was just to be able to talk to other women about their experiences with cancer. So thank you Counterpart for being there.'

Layla*, service user

Talking to another woman who has experienced cancer can be immensely helpful for many women. Counterpart's Peer Support Volunteers are all women who have experienced cancer themselves and they listen without judgement, provide emotional and practical support, and give hope to women who use our service.

Over the last year, the pandemic continued to impact us all and our Peer Support Volunteers remained flexible and volunteered from home to ensure women with cancer could still access support. As restrictions eased, some came back into the Resource Centre for their volunteer shifts. Wherever they were making calls, they continued to be briefed and supported by staff members.

*name has been changed.

Our new Resource Centre

In May 2022, we moved the Counterpart Resource Centre from level 5, down to level 2 of the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. We now have a beautiful and much larger space, on the same floor as the staff offices.

We are looking forward to welcoming women with cancer back into our Resource Centre later in 2022.



A health professional's Perspective



Gini Adcock

ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORKER
YARRA RANGES HEALTH

Counterpart and Yarra Ranges Health Day Oncology have been running wellbeing style workshops for a few years. In recognition of the distress and trauma that people go through as their cancer is diagnosed and treated, we have appreciated Counterpart's assistance in providing positive body experiences for these people.

Originally Counterpart approached us as they wanted to extend their services to women in outer suburbs. We now offer 2 sessions each year and choose the program in consultation with Counterpart. Yoga, meditation and Tai Chi are some of the topics. It has been a pleasure working with Counterpart and we are very happy to be able to offer our patients a free and positive experience where they can also connect with other women going through similar experiences.

Bridge of Support is back

In June 2022, after a two-year hiatus, Bridge of Support resumed at our partner hospitals: The Royal Melbourne, Royal Women's and Sunshine hospitals. This program connects women with Counterpart Peer Support Volunteers while they are at the hospital for treatment or appointments. The support and reassurance of our volunteers can give women much needed hope during a difficult time. Linking into a community-based support service while still a patient can also make the end of treatment transition much easier.

In 2021, Counterpart restructured our team, and appointed Mary Macheras-Magias to the new role of Bridge of Support Coordinator. With a dedicated staff member working across all sites, our focus for the year was on renewing our relationships with hospital staff who work with women with cancer, as well as ensuring that our volunteers meet all the requirements, such as vaccinations and appropriate checks, to be able to attend hospital sites.

Before Covid-19, Bridge of Support was one of the main ways women first connected with Counterpart. While the program was unable to run, we were still able to provide peer support to women thanks to hospital staff who continued to refer their patients in increasing numbers during 2021–2022.



Elizabeth's
STORY

I'm so grateful to my counterpart, the Peer Support Volunteer at Counterpart, who helped me through my 'to reconstruct or not to reconstruct' dilemma immediately following a 'mastectomy storm' that my head had created. Unfortunately (or fortunately as I like to look at it), there were no more in person coffees/get togethers/social groups with other peers that were diagnosed early 2021 to talk to or to compare notes with. It was pretty much a solitary journey.

I had been discussing my dilemma with my wonderful Breast Care Nurse Allison who recommended I phone Counterpart and speak to one of their Peer Support Volunteers, which I did. I wish I remembered her name but amongst all the appointments and brain fog of chemo, I've forgotten. She helped me more than anyone else and I'll be forever grateful. Know that I'm sending you virtual flowers everyday.

I once wanted to be a face of BreastScreen Victoria, now, I look forward to volunteering with this wonderful service myself one day. I strongly urge all women affected by cancer, if you're struggling, your counterpart – a Peer Support Volunteer – will be able to listen to your concerns, perhaps provide their journey and provide hope and encouragement that you need with whatever issues you are dealing with. Sending love to all.

Women Supporting Women

Advanced/metastatic cancer support

Meeting the needs of women living with advanced/metastatic cancer has been one of our priorities since Counterpart was first established. However, since the pandemic began, we have seen an increase in the proportion of our service users who are living with a cancer which has spread to other parts of their body. Over a quarter of the women who used our service in 2021–2022 are living with metastatic disease.

We encourage women living with advanced/metastatic cancer to apply to become Peer Support Volunteers and have a number of them currently volunteering. They play a significant role in not only supporting other women with similar diagnoses, but also helping to ensure that staff and their fellow Peer Support Volunteers understand the complexities of living with metastatic cancer.

Advanced/metastatic cancer is also included in Counterpart's peer support training so that all Peer Support Volunteers can listen empathically and provide appropriate information and support to service users with this diagnosis.

Counterpart also runs events for women living with advanced/metastatic cancer through our Making Connections program. Events in this program don't just provide information on topics specific to advanced cancer, they also provide spaces where women can share and connect with each other. You can read more about our events on pages 12–13.



Robyn's STORY

During my first breast cancer experience I was living overseas. Although I was a patient at a breast clinic attached to a large hospital in a university town of some 205,000 people, telephone support was not available.

My second breast cancer experience was here in Australia, and I was very fortunate to find out about Counterpart. I didn't need assistance with my diagnosis or treatment options, but I found the chats with the Peer Support Volunteer invaluable. When I answered my phone and heard her warm and cheery voice my mood lifted. Our conversations were often the only chance I had to let off steam or to drop the facade I was presenting to my family and friends. It was wonderful to have someone on the end of the phone who understood. Sometimes it is very trying having people close to you reminding you to be positive and think of others who are even more ill. I was able to tell my Peer Support Volunteer that I was having a shocking day and felt like hiding from the world. There was no judgment and no jolly along by this very sensitive woman. She just let me get it off my chest and did occasionally make a suggestion to help me to navigate my family if she thought that may help or suggesting coping strategies I had not yet considered.

I would encourage other women with cancer to reach out to a Peer Support Volunteer to see if these chats may assist you with the multitude of questions, anxieties, decisions and other related issues a diagnosis of cancer throws at you. It is a service that may not be the answer for everyone, but in my experience at the time I was feeling most vulnerable, it certainly helped me and gave me a completely confidential, anonymous place where I could just be my 'real' self. I thankfully did not require the service over a long period, but the sincerity and warmth of the volunteer and her honesty helped me to get through a very difficult time and find some hope for the future.



1 in 4 service users are living with advanced/metastatic cancer

Supporting all women with cancer

For almost 20 years, we have seen what a difference peer support can make to women with breast or a gynaecological cancer. From 1 July 2022, Counterpart extended our services so that all women with cancer, no matter what type, could access the same support.

Throughout the last year, we have been steadily preparing for this expansion. Our project coordinator, Jan Savage, joined us in 2021 and, with Manager Fiona McRae and Women's Health Victoria's CEO Dianne Hill, has met with representatives from a range of different cancer organisations. We have built new partnerships and carefully planned our expansion so that we are increasing the support options available for women with cancer without duplicating existing services.

Hearing more stories from women with cancer highlighted the gaps in the support available to those with some types of cancer. We also found many commonalities. Concerns about body image, managing side-effects and uncertainty about the future are felt by many women with breast or a gynaecological cancer as well.



Pictured: Jan Savage, Service Expansion Project Coordinator (left), with Trish F, Peer Support Volunteer.

Patricia's STORY

Dear Counterpart team, It is really helpful to share experiences with each other. Non-Hodgkin lymphoma is the fifth or sixth most common cancer in Australia now but there is very, very little for blood cancer so people can share experiences and get together.

I have learnt so much from your supportive events and the holistic approach Counterpart takes with varied speakers to help support women with cancer to live better. I just don't



While everyone's experience is different, speaking to another woman who has had cancer can help. Photo: iStock.

Training volunteers and staff

An essential part of Counterpart's model is the support and training given to Peer Support Volunteers. We held a 3-day training program in June 2022, to prepare staff and volunteers for the expansion to all cancers.

- Topics included:**
- consumer perspectives
 - cancer organisations and their programs
 - surgical treatments
 - medical treatments
 - psychosocial impacts
 - stigma and discrimination.

We have listed all the individuals and organisations who generously assisted us with this training on page 19.

Counterpart attended Breast Cancer Network Australia's forum in Ballarat in May 2022. The day was a welcome chance to talk to women with cancer face to face, as well as catch up with staff from the Ballarat Cancer Centre.

know what I would have done without this support and meeting other women with cancer and the staff's understanding.

I am SO grateful that you welcomed me to join in your programs, as I had no support at all once I left hospital after chemo. I will never forget your kindness.

Best wishes
Patricia*

*name has been changed

Our volunteers and peer support

714 hours of peer support
= 29 days and 18 hours

419.5 hours of training*

*this includes the majority of Peer Support Volunteers doing additional training for the expansion to supporting women with all types of cancer

Peer support

Top **5** topics discussed

General support

Side effects

Emotional support

Treatment

Family/relationships



2021-2022 AT A GLANCE

CONNECTING | SUPPORTING | INFORMING

Women who used our service

26% have identified they are living with advanced/metastatic cancer

24% live in a rural and regional area

Top **4** languages spoken (after English)
(Where language has been reported)



Website

1211

Past webinars viewed



12,395

unique visitors
(25% increase on the previous year)

78,341

page views

Events

36 webinars and online workshops

1 in-person event (thanks to Covid)

Most popular events

Sleep and cancer



Toxic chemicals in everyday products

Belly dance

Qi gong

It's in the genes: how genetics can influence cancer and its treatment

Email list

2963 total subscribers

2243 women affected by cancer

720 service providers



Online communications

Connecting with information

What's On program

Clinical and information

Endometrial cancer Danielle Carpenter and Nicole Kinnane, Nurse Consultants, Gynae-oncology Service, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Healthy eating after cancer Bree Voegt, Senior Dietitian, Cabrini Health

It's in the genes: how genetics can influence cancer and its treatment Dr Yoland Antill, Medical Oncologist, Peninsula Health

Lobular cancer Dr Sophie Nightingale, Breast Surgeon, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Royal Melbourne Hospital and Western Health

Maintaining healthy habits Dr Amanda Horden, Managing Director, Bayside Healthy Living

Medicinal cannabis Dr Shu Ng, Medicinal Cannabis Clinician

Ovarian Cancer Australia Fiona Mitchell, Nurse Consultant, Ovarian Cancer Australia

Self care for lymphoedema Kate Rogers, Physiotherapist and Lymphoedema therapist, and Margaret, Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer

Sleep and cancer Dr Oliver Holmes, Psychologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Toxic chemicals in everyday products Dr Sarah Lantz, author and researcher, and Carolyn Russo, Low toxic chemicals coach

WeCan OlderCan online resource Prof. Mei Krishnasamy, Chair in Cancer Nursing at the University of Melbourne and Director, Academic Nursing Unit at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre; and Catherine Devereaux, Co-Design Researcher, Education Designer and Clinician, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and University of Melbourne

Creative

Belly dance (2 sessions) Charni Pilkington, Instructor, Happy Hips Belly Dance

Bollywood dance for wellbeing Anjali Sengupta, Dance Movement Therapist, Embracing Spirit

Courage and hope – art therapy session Jackie Burden, Art Therapist, Melbourne Art Therapy Studio

Creative activity – exploring where to from here Sandra Buchanan, Expressive Art Therapist and Counsellor

Creative activity exploring resilience Sandra Buchanan, Expressive Art Therapist and Counsellor

Creative visualisation Nadia Addabbo, Holistic Therapist, Balanced Wellbeing

Dance flow Sally Low, Feldenkrais Practitioner and Physiotherapist, Salamander Centre

Writing workshop Adele Hulse, Author and Editor

Wellbeing

Chair yoga Sarasvati Dawson, Yoga and Meditation Practitioner

Dru yoga (2 sessions) Susan Parsons, Yoga and Meditation Practitioner

Happy body, calm mind Swami Kurunananda, Yoga and Meditation Practitioner

Managing uncertainty Liz O'Brien, Mindfulness and Wellbeing Coach, Liz O'Brien: Wellbeing for Individuals and Organisations

Mindfulness and emotions (2 sessions – one in partnership with Eastern Health) Kathy Jerin, Yoga and Meditation practitioner, Body, Mind and You

Qi gong (2 sessions) Dorota Swiderski, Qi gong Practitioner, Quiescence: Acupuncture and Apothecary

The Pinc Program Luci Minogue, Physiotherapist, Inner Strength Bayside

Why and how to exercise Dr Amy Dennett, Researcher and Physiotherapist, Eastern Health

Making Connections Program

Art Therapy for women with metastatic cancer Conny Weyrich, Art Therapist, Melbourne Art Therapy Studio

Breast Care Nurses: supporting women with metastatic breast cancer Marika Franklin, Researcher, Macquarie University; Jenny Macindoe, McGrath Metastatic Breast Care Nurse, Peninsula Health; and Andrea Smith, Research Fellow, University of Sydney

Managing metastatic cancer pain A/Prof. Brian Le, Director Palliative Care, Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre

The emotional load of living with metastatic cancer Dr Dani Bullen, Clinical Psychologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Trial using medicinal cannabis for bone metastasis Daniel Tan, Pharmacist and Regional Team Leader, Medlab Clinical Ltd

Worrying about loved ones Belinda Astl, Psychologist, Melbourne Psycho-oncology

Events at Counterpart

'The best thing was connecting me with who I am inside. Dealing with imminent death and endless treatment, medications, visits to Peter Mac and a worried family has left me with a limited view of who I am now. It was lovely to discover what my body can still do and with the best of memories of precious times and places and people rejuvenated. I felt whole afterwards.'

Annette*, Dance flow workshop attendee

You can see the breadth of topics and skilled, highly qualified presenters in the list of free events run by Counterpart over the last year on the previous page.

We have two programs of events. What's On is for all women with cancer, no matter what stage. Making Connections is just for women living with advanced/metastatic cancer. Our webinars are also attended by health professionals when they are on clinical topics of interest. Our online workshops are smaller and run using Zoom meetings, so participants can see each other as well as the presenter. For some topics, we restrict events to only women with cancer to ensure that we provide a safe space for women to share. For other events, women are welcome to bring a support person, such as a friend or family member.



Jenny's STORY

The first time I heard about Counterpart was at Barwon Health. While waiting for my oncology appointment, I noticed a flyer advertising an information session organised by Counterpart in partnership with Barwon Health. It was a video conference of a live event in Melbourne into one of the meetings rooms at Andrew Love Cancer Centre in Geelong. The room was full. This was before we all used Zoom!

Counterpart continue with webinars and online workshops which has been a great support over Covid. Also I live in a regional area, so I appreciate not having to travel to Melbourne to hear up-to-date and relevant information from professional presenters.

I just love the variation in topics that's provided. It is a very holistic program.

I find the mind, emotions and supportive care workshops help me best as they help me manage physical treatment and side effects of metastatic breast cancer.

With thanks and gratitude.



Luci Minogue, physiotherapist and Director of Inner Strength Bayside, presents at Counterpart's The Pinc Program online workshop, February 2022.

While webinars have been a part of our program since 2014, all our events moved online during the pandemic. In 2021–2022, only one event was held face to face – Mindfulness and emotions – which was organised in partnership with Yarra Ranges Health in March 2022. We have scheduled more of these events later in 2022, and hope to be able to organise some events in regional areas in 2023.

*name has been changed.

Connecting with information

Webinar recordings

Organising group events where women can access information and connect with each other has been an important part of Counterpart's work ever since we began, back in 2003. We later started running some of these events as webinars, so that more women had the option of attending.

There are a lot of different reasons that women might not be able to make it to one of our events — work, distance,

medical appointments, illness or caring commitments. Some topics are only relevant to women at a particular time too — for example, when they are making decisions about treatment. By recording webinars and making them available online, women can watch them anywhere and any time, when they need information on that topic.

In 2021–2022, we added 16 new webinars to the Counterpart website. Webinars are reviewed and taken off the website if they become outdated or are replaced by more recent presentations. By the end of June, there were 78 recordings available.

Top 5 webinar recordings

- Medicinal cannabis, Dr Shu Ng (2021)
- Radiation therapy for breast cancer, Kez Brown and Naina Dhana (2020)
- Scars, cording and swelling, Sachini Ganhewa (2020)
- Self-care for lymphoedema, Kate Rogers and Margaret (2022)
- Peripheral neuropathy, Dr Shirley Wong (2019)



Photo by Magnet.me on Unsplash

Madeline's STORY

I started my journey with cancer twenty years ago. I was scared and felt isolated. My chemotherapy nurse talked to me about ovarian cancer support group and helped me to join it. I was waiting with joy and hope to meet those wonderful people, listen and talk to them.

I only discovered Counterpart when Ovarian Cancer Australia moved into the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, where Counterpart is located. I started attending meetings with interesting guest speakers.

Then, Covid-19 and the lockdown came and our face-to-face meetings were replaced with webinars and online workshops. At first, I did not like the virtual meetings, but soon I found the beauty of listening to people living too far away, whom probably I would have not had the chance to meet in person.

Over the last year, I went to webinars on topics like sleep and cancer, and how genetics can influence cancer and its treatment. I also tried art therapy, yoga, dance and mindfulness workshops.

I learnt so many interesting things to help ease my journey with cancer. And am still learning. Here am I photographed with my beloved Chuky, my chocolate labrador who came in our house when I was very sick and shared with us 10 years of unconditional love and happiness.

New website launch

Have you ever wondered how many coffees it takes a small team to redesign a website? The Counterpart team found the answer: 576. That is how many we drank while working on this project.

Over an 18-month period, we ran five focus groups and did numerous rounds of consultation and user testing to find what women with cancer and health professionals want to know about our service, then how they would go about finding it. We worked with our developers, Attractor Solutions, to put that knowledge into action and redesign our website.

- Top priorities:**
- make it easy to request peer support or refer a patient
 - organise the recorded webinars so they can be easily browsed
 - share some of the stories of women who have used the service
 - use lots of photos of women to reflect the woman-centred nature of our service.

After working hard to fit this big project in around the team's existing work, we were very pleased to launch the new site on 9 November 2021. A big thank you to everyone who helped us. You can look at the new website at counterpart.org.au

Counterpart Navigator

The amount of information about cancer available increases every day. While this is a good thing, it can make finding the right information at the right time even more overwhelming. Co-designed with women with cancer, the Counterpart Navigator is an online resource that helps women easily find evidence-based information on common topics related to their cancer.

The Counterpart Navigator covers early breast cancer and all stages of six gynaecological cancers. All the resources included have been reviewed by health professionals and women with cancer to make sure they are evidence based and useful.

Each year, Counterpart staff and Information Volunteers spend time testing and reviewing the Navigator to make sure it is kept up to date and all links are working. When resources are updated, or new resources become available, we rely on the generous support of a range of qualified Australian health professionals and women with cancer to review them and assess whether they will be included in the Navigator.

In 2021–2022, the most visited navigators and topics were:

- Breast (surgery, hormonal treatments, mastectomy)
- Vulval (questions for your team, just diagnosed, when cancer won't go away)
- Uterine (just diagnosed, treatment, personal stories)
- Cervical (personal stories, just diagnosed, treatment)

Visit counterpart.org.au/navigator



Our People

Volunteering at Counterpart

Volunteers are the heart of Counterpart. Our Peer Support Volunteers provide understanding and support that can only come from another woman with a lived experience of cancer. Our Information Volunteers help review information resources for women with cancer.

Despite the ongoing impact of Covid-19, volunteers have continued their important work:

- making peer support calls from their homes
- coming back into the Resource Centre when it has been safe to do so
- contributing to our service expansion work
- assisting with recruitment and training of new Peer Support Volunteers
- helping to review pamphlets and Navigator content.

In August 2021, training for a new intake of Peer Support Volunteers was held online for the first time. In another first, they also completed their orientation over Microsoft Teams, as they learnt from experienced Peer Support Volunteers as they provided phone support.

Volunteers have also supported the preparation for Counterpart's expansion to all cancers by taking part in a special training course in June 2022. This prepared our Peer Support Volunteers to provide the same quality of support to women with all types of cancer.



Rachel's STORY

My name is Rachel, and I have been volunteering at Counterpart for almost 12 months, having completed my training in the 2021 intake. I have been wanting to become a Peer Support Volunteer since late 2018 after hearing about Counterpart. I was diagnosed with cancer at age 32, just weeks after my first child was born, and I remember not having anyone to talk to about my experience at the time. All I wanted was to have someone to chat with and provide hope for my future, and ever since then, I have been wanting to find a way to do that for other women.

Due to the Covid pandemic and lockdowns, our training was held 100% online via Zoom. Counterpart staff members Mary and Kellie did an incredible job to coordinate it all, engaging fantastic guest presenters and organising activities for the group to bond and learn. We had practice scenarios to work through with feedback from both the presenters and also other experienced volunteers.

As a younger woman (and mother who had a baby when going through treatment), I think that I can provide hope to other young women and mothers because I know exactly the extra complexities of having children in the picture while having to attend treatment, manage appointments and also keep up the family life. It can be a terrible lonely and isolating experience and I love that I can help someone not feel alone in their journey.

Counterpart is one of the most wonderful services I've had the privilege of being part of, and they are so passionate about helping and supporting women with cancer. I have felt nothing but supported and cared about since my first phone call with Kellie and I'm so grateful to have made the connections and be part of it all.

Our volunteers

We give our heartfelt thanks to everyone who volunteered for Counterpart this year. Your generosity, kindness and commitment to supporting women with cancer to live well continues to make a difference.

Peer Support Volunteers

Ailsa, Barbara, Branka, Bridget, Chris, Danni, Emma, Evelyn, Glenda, Jenny, Khim, Liz, Lyn, Margaret, May, Meri, Pam, Pam S, Penny, Rhonda, Sue, Teresa, Trish F, Trish M, Wilma

2021 Intake

Elena, Helen, Kath, Lisa, Rachel, Sharon

Information Volunteers

Diana, Jan, Susan, Tia



Trish's STORY

When I was initially diagnosed with breast cancer in 2014, I realised pretty quickly that I had quite a journey ahead: a mastectomy, an axillary clearance, 5 months of chemotherapy, 5 weeks of radiation and then 12 months of the targeted therapy Herceptin. A DIEP reconstruction in 2016 was the final step.

Never in my wildest dreams however, did I think I would end up discussing my journey with women of all walks of life on a regular basis. This is the role that Counterpart plays: allowing and supporting women like me to provide peer support for other women diagnosed with cancer.

In 2016, I read an article about BreaCan (as Counterpart was once called) and immediately decided that this was something I needed and wanted to become involved in. Being a Peer Support Volunteer with Counterpart has, without a doubt, become one of the most significant parts of my life.

Due to Covid, in the last two years we have had to provide most of our peer support via phone conversations from home. Despite the obvious

We remember two Peer Support Volunteers:
Chris, who died in December 2021, and Denise, who died in August 2022. Both these women contributed to Counterpart enormously over the years, and will be remembered and greatly missed.



challenges, we have all tried our best to provide comfort and a listening ear to women with cancer. These women have had the unique challenges of navigating their cancer diagnosis with the added layer of isolation, the inability to engage with medical professionals face-to-face and trepidation about their diagnosis in a world otherwise fixated on the pandemic.

Over the past 6 years, I have loved chatting with and supporting women over the phone, at the Resource Centre, at hospitals (through the Bridge of Support program) or at various events.

We offer women the opportunity to obtain information about resources and practical support available to them. But just as importantly, they can ask us about our own cancer journey and find comfort in relating to someone else's story. And often, just having someone listen with a kind ear is all that is needed to regain a sense of hope and calm.

I look forward to working with women who are diagnosed with any type of cancer, as Counterpart ventures forward and expands its services even more.



(Back, L-R) Wendy Pullan, Tia, Susan, Jan Savage, Diana, Fiona McRae, Teresa, Helen. (Front, L-R) Penny, Rhonda, Trish, Margaret, Branka.

National Volunteer Week, 16-22 May 2022

The theme for this year's National Volunteer Week was 'Better together', and we were reminded just how true that was at a morning tea held for our volunteers. This annual celebration is a chance for us to say thank you for everything they do to support women living with cancer. This year we met in the new Counterpart Resource Centre so our volunteers could see the new space, as well as catch up with each other over a cuppa. We also presented certificates for 10 years of volunteer service to Bridget, and 5 years of volunteer service to Branka, Diana and Penny.



Bridget and Counterpart Manager Fiona McRae.



(L-R) Teresa, Diana, Tia, Susan and Expansion Project Coordinator Jan Savage.



(L-R) Penny and Rhonda.

Our People

Our staff



Fiona McRae
Manager



Wendy Pullan
Program Coordinator



Kellie Holland
Team Leader Operations and
Volunteer Coordinator



Linda Rehill
Program and Resources Coordinator



Katherine Bradstreet
Communications Coordinator



Jan Savage
Service Expansion Project Coordinator



Rebecca Harraghy
Administration Officer



Ada Castle
Casual Programs Coordinator



Mary Macheras-Magias
Bridge of Support Coordinator
and Training Coordinator



Lieve De Clercq
Casual Programs Coordinator

Farewells

Lauren Ferris
Digital Resources Coordinator
(until July 2021)

Louise Knell
Casual Programs Coordinator
(until July 2021)

Counterpart Advisory Group

Christine Evely (Chair)
Monique Baldacchino
Danielle Carpenter
Liz Dax
Carmel McCarthy
Alison Murphy
Helen Blennerhassett (Counterpart volunteer)
Trish Ferrier (Counterpart volunteer)

Farewells

Bernadette Zappa (until March 2022)

Our Supporters

Our heartfelt thanks to the following people and organisations for their support in 2021–2022. Your support helps us to connect, support and inform women with cancer to live well.

Donors

George Adda	Grill'd (Local Matters program)	Nina Macgeorge	Janet Sigley
After Breast Cancer Exercise Group	Liza Janakievski	The Medcroft family	TWOBS
Amanda Allen	Jeff Hawke	Roberta Munro	Alan Wilkinson
Christopher Furneaux	Aby Hutchinson-West	Massiny Ng	Carol Wilkinson
	Carminia Lapuz	Jennifer Pietsch	<i>There were also donors who wished to remain anonymous.</i>

In-kind donations

Michelle Ainsworth	Jo Hall	Simone Leyden	Kate Rogers
Dr Tilly Anderson	Dr Oliver Holmes	Jenny Macindoe	Nadia Rosin
Dr Yoland Antill	Dr Amanda Horden	Paul Magias	Andrea Smith
Belinda Astl	Adele Hulse	Margaret	Andrew Smith
Danielle Carpenter	Dr Meagan Inglis	Pat Meehan	Kylie Stephens
Kaitlyn Christie	Kellie-Ann Jolly	Luci Minogue	Leanne Storer
Audrey Colbert	Nicole Kinnane	Fiona Mitchell	Rita Surendar
Meredith Cummins	A/Prof. David Kok	Dr Shu Ng	Dorota Swiderski
Wendy Dawson	Prof. Mei Krishnasamy	Dr Sophie Nightingale	Daniel Tan
Catherine Devereaux	Swami Kurunananda	Nicole Parkinson	Sophie Thompson
Tiffany Dobson	Helen Lacy	Susan Parsons	Dr Michelle White
Joylene Fletcher	A/Prof. Brian Le	Dr Brindha Pillay	Prof. Carlene Wilson
Dr Marika Franklin	Emma Lehane	Dr Meron Pitcher	Jo Wilson

Expansion project

Cancer Council Victoria	Lung Foundation
Australia and New Zealand Sarcoma Association (ANZSA)	Neuroendocrine Cancers Australia
Bladder Cancer Australia Charity Foundation	Melanoma Patients Australia
Bowel Cancer Australia	Pancare Foundation
Head and Neck Cancer Australia	Rare Cancers Australia
Leukaemia Foundation	Victorian Integrated Cancer Services

Friends of Counterpart

Gini Adcock	Kellie-Ann Jolly
Belinda Astl	Pink Affair
Attractor Solutions	Sharina Riva
Community Data Solutions	Louise Stuart
Amanda Coop	A/Prof. Anna Ugalde
IT Strategic	Prof. Vicki White
Sam Burrone Design	

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Victorian Government




Project funding


Australian Communities
Foundation



COUNTERPART

Women supporting women with cancer

 1300 781 500

 info@counterpart.org.au

 counterpart.org.au

Hours of operation


Monday 10am–5pm


Wednesday 10am–5pm

Thursday 10am–5pm

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

Counterpart Resource Centre

 Level 2, Queen Victoria Women's Centre
210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000


 Postal address
GPO Box 1066, Melbourne 3001



Counterpart is a service of
Women's Health Victoria




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