



COLLABORATIVE INSIGHTS: MULTI-SECTORAL WORKSHOP REPORT

**Striving to improve health
outcomes for Malay women
living with breast cancer**

19 JANUARY 2024

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1. FOREWORD



Dr Choo Bok Ai

Vice President, Breast Cancer Foundation
Senior Consultant Radiation Oncologist
Icon Cancer Centre

In my practice, I come across many Malay women who present with advanced local breast cancer, where the breasts are fungating, bleeding, infected, and causing much pain. At these late stages, there are fewer treatment options, and the clinical outcomes can only be improved by palliative treatments. It is imperative that we drive home the point of early detection: saving breasts, and saving lives. The comparatively lower rate of screenings warrants a collective, national effort to be mounted.

This maiden attempt at a platform for multi-sectoral stakeholder dialogue seeks to kickstart collaborative exploration for bigger impact and action - to save lives and alleviate suffering from those affected by breast cancer. BCF is leading the charge to galvanise action, driven by the conviction that together, we possess the collective power to not only confront the challenges faced by Malay women with breast cancer but to overcome them.

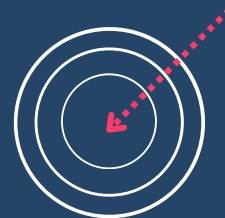
This multi-sectoral stakeholder workshop is more than just a meeting of minds—it is a clarion call for unity, innovation, and compassion in the service of a cause that touches the lives of so many in our community. Together, we can shape a future where every woman has the support, care, and resources she needs to face breast cancer with strength and hope.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Joining hands across sectors, we strive to bridge the gap, reduce disparities, and ensure timely diagnosis and compassionate care for Malay women battling breast cancer in Singapore. Our collective efforts will not only save lives but also enrich communities, fostering a healthier, more equitable society for all.

Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF), in collaboration with Roche and the Society of Behavioural Health Singapore (SBHS), convened a multi-sectoral workshop with the aim of enhancing health outcomes for Malay women in Singapore living with breast cancer.

Workshop Report Objectives



MSW @ a Glance

DATE HELD

19 Jan 2024, 2-5pm

LOCATION

Breast Cancer Foundation

NO. OF ATTENDEES

22

STAKEHOLDERS REPRESENTED

- 3 Patient organizations
- 3 Health clusters
- 3 Malay-muslim organizations
- 4 Patients
- 1 Government agency
- 1 Industry partner

Gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges confronting Malay women in Singapore concerning breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Identify and analyse the primary factors contributing to the persistent disparities in breast cancer incidence, late-stage diagnosis, and mortality rates among Malay women in Singapore.

Bring together stakeholders across healthcare clusters, civil society, government, and the private sector to align and synergize efforts, with the overarching goal of achieving equitable access to timely diagnosis and compassionate care for Malay women with breast cancer in Singapore.

Develop and implement a range of cross-sectoral strategies to effectively address the identified challenges, including fostering collaboration with healthcare professionals, religious and community leaders, and enhancing accessibility to breast screening services.

3. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT



01 — Disproportionate burden of disease among Malay women

Breast cancer has been the most common cancer among Singaporean women for the past 50 years.¹ Today, nearly 29.7% of all cancers diagnosed in females are breast cancer, and it remains the leading cause of cancer deaths among women.²

With early detection and today's advancement in treatment, the survival rate for breast cancer is relatively high.³ Stage I breast cancer patients have a five-year survival rate of 90% and Stage II patients have a five-year survival rate of 80%.⁴

Breast cancer is highly treatable if detected early. Timely screening is widely recognised as key to and cost-effective in reducing the disease burden and mortality resulting from breast cancer.

As of 2022, nearly 37.6% of Singapore women aged 50 to 69 participated in breast cancer screening, but within the Malay community, only 21.5% of women in this age group participated.⁵ This disparity highlights significant challenges facing Malay women in accessing timely breast cancer screening and treatment.

For our Malay community, breast cancer presents a complex array of challenges, ranging from **cultural beliefs** to **systemic barriers** that hinder timely diagnosis and treatment initiation.

Reasons For Not Doing A Mammography⁶

- “Not necessary as I am healthy” (40.5%);
- “Painful test” (16.9%);
- “Never thought about it” (10.4%);
- “No time due to work/family commitment” (8.5%);
- “Not suggested by doctors” (6.4%); and
- “Afraid of knowing the results” (6.4%).

¹ Ling, A., Ling Li, F. et al. (2022). Singapore Cancer Registry Annual Report 2019. National Registry of Diseases Office. <https://www.nrdo.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider3/default-document-library/scr-2019-annual-report-final.pdf>.

² Breast Cancer: What is Breast Cancer (n.d.). Singapore Cancer Society. <https://www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg/learn-about-cancer/types-of-cancer/breast-cancer.html#overview>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The importance of Breast Cancer Research (n.d.). National Cancer Centre Singapore. <https://www.nccs.com.sg/giving/pages/breast-cancer-research.aspx>.

⁵ National Population Health Survey 2022. (2023). Epidemiology & Disease Control Division and Policy, Research & Surveillance Group Ministry of Health and Health Promotion Board, Singapore. https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/resources-statistics/reports/nphs-2022-survey-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=3bf4ad4_0.

⁶ Ibid.

3. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT



02 — Statistical Data Shows Higher Mortality Rates

Recent statistics reveal that Malays in Singapore have a lower five-year age-standardised relative survival rate (45.9%) compared to other ethnic groups.⁷ Additionally, mortality rates among Malay women with breast cancer tend to be higher, often due to late-stage diagnosis and delayed treatment initiation.⁸ These disparities underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve outcomes within this population.



03 — Factors contributing to Late-Stage Diagnosis

Late-stage diagnosis remains a significant issue among Malay women with breast cancer. Cultural taboos surrounding discussions of breast health and screening, coupled with a lack of awareness about the importance of early detection, contribute to delayed presentation to healthcare providers. Socioeconomic factors such as limited access to healthcare facilities and financial constraints further exacerbate the problem.



04 — Cultural & Societal Barriers to Seeking Treatment

Cultural beliefs and societal norms play a significant role in shaping health-seeking behaviours among Malay women.⁹ Misconceptions about cancer, fear of stigma, and reliance on alternative therapies may lead some individuals to avoid seeking medical help until symptoms become severe. Moreover, familial obligations and caregiving responsibilities can deter women from prioritising their health needs.

⁷ Ling, A., Ling, L. F. et al. (n.1)

⁸ Goh, S. A., Lee, J. K., Seh, W. Y. et al. Multi-level determinants of breast cancer screening among Malay-Muslim women in Singapore: a sequential mixed-methods study. *BMC Women's Health* 22, 383 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-01972-y>

⁹ ibid

4. MULTI-SECTORIAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

“Bersatu Kita Teguh, Bercerai Kita Roboh”

“United We Stand, Divided We Fall”

Transformative solutions emerge at the intersection of whole-of-government and whole-of-society efforts. The multifaceted nature of health outcomes—encompassing early detection, access to care, psychological support, and post-treatment reintegration—demands an equally multifaceted response. By engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders, we can harness a wide range of perspectives, expertise, and resources, fostering an environment ripe for innovative and sustainable solutions that can be tailored to meet the needs of Malay women battling breast cancer.



ELEVATING AWARENESS & PRACTICES

Addressing cultural and socio-economic barriers faced by Malay women with breast cancer to advocate for inclusive policies and targeted interventions.



HARNESSING COLLECTIVE POWER

Integrating patient insights, professional expertise, academic research, and practical implementation to inform effective strategies and translate workshop outcomes into tangible actions benefiting patients.



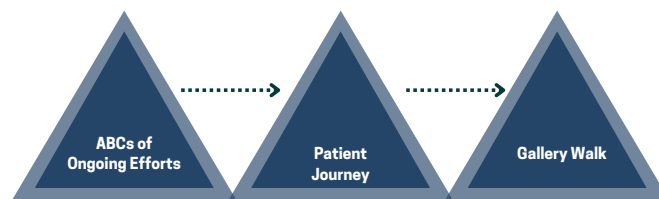
SYNERGY OF PERSPECTIVES

Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF), Roche, and Society for Behavioural Health Singapore are spearheading a collaborative initiative to enhance health outcomes for Malay women with breast cancer. This multi-sectoral approach aims to catalyse innovative solutions by uniting diverse stakeholders.

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Leading with the patient voice, our BCF member-facilitators inspired meaningful dialogues through sharing their lived experiences. We adopted the following three strategies in kicking off the multi-sectoral engagement.

Given that this was the first meeting and the time frame was limited, these strategies were embraced as a springboard to lay out the existing efforts, brainstorm and exchange ideas based on the stakeholders representatives' observations in their unique roles contributing towards breast health among women in Singapore.



ABCs of Ongoing Efforts - Actions, Benefits & Challenges

The stakeholders' meeting started with the ABCs of ongoing efforts. The participants stated the Actions, Benefits, and Challenges of the efforts by their organisation on Post-its, and these Post-its are then mapped onto the respective stages of the BCF patient journey.

ACTION

- Systematically identify and document actions taken by participating stakeholders to improve outcomes for Malay women with breast cancer.
- Gather information on various efforts implemented by stakeholders' organizations.

BENEFIT

- Facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of breast cancer care and support efforts.
- Enable stakeholders to identify synergies, gaps, and areas for collaboration aligned with the needs of Malay women with breast cancer.

CHALLENGES

- Mapping ongoing initiatives may highlight areas such as resource allocation and on-the-ground engagement and follow-ups.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Gain insights into the breadth of efforts aimed at supporting Malay women with breast cancer.
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing and foster collaboration among participating stakeholders.

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES



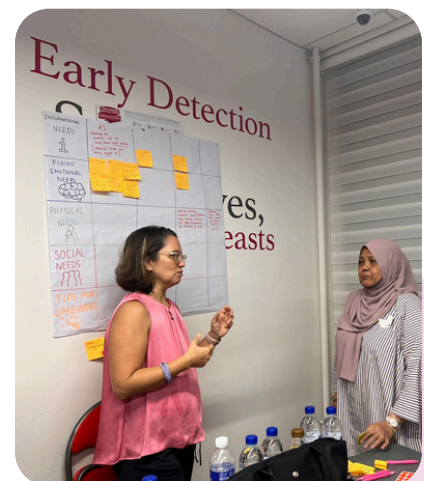
Patient Journey

By focusing on the patient journey, stakeholders can gain insights into the lived experiences of women with breast cancer, placing their needs, preferences, and challenges at the forefront of discussions. This person-centric approach involved gathering insights through in-depth interviews with 25 breast cancer current survivors and caregivers. In commemoration of its 20-year landmark of advocacy and support efforts, Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) commissioned independent research agency, Blackbox Research to assess the holistic needs of breast cancer survivors and caregivers and to determine need gaps.



Gallery Walk

To enable a cross-exchange of ideas across the participating groups, the gallery walk was conducted for the groups to look through the post-its on the wall put together by the different groups. The person-centric focus of the gallery walk fosters empathy, understanding, and collaboration among stakeholders, encouraging them to identify potential areas of synergy and gaps, and generate ideas that are responsive to the diverse needs of Malay women with breast cancer. The long-term goal is to synergise and drive interventions that are grounded in the lived experiences and voices of those impacted by breast cancer.



"I think it's important for conversations like this to take place, where we can help to address various challenges faced by fringe groups within society, and this workshop has helped highlight some issues that the Malay-Muslim community is facing. It's been a privilege being a part of this conversation, and such collaborations can help to foster unity amongst organisations, paving the way forward to help improve our screening rates within our various communities."

-Aly Khairuddin

Breast Cancer Warrior

BCF Advocate & Workshop Facilitator

6. THE PATIENT JOURNEY

Breast cancer survivors endure a journey fraught with uncertainty and stress, spanning from detection to rehabilitation. Understanding their holistic needs is crucial for caregivers and communities to provide effective support throughout this journey.

Survivors' overall well-being hinges on addressing their informational, psycho-emotional, physical and social needs. They face critical decisions upon diagnosis, endure physical challenges such as fatigue and appearance changes during treatment, benefit greatly from social support, and grapple with psycho-emotional strains including self-esteem and emotional upheaval.

To illustrate these needs across the breast cancer care journey, BCF together with BlackBox, mapped them into four stages: 'Detection & Diagnosis,' 'Treatment & Surgery,' 'Rehabilitation,' and 'Palliative Care.' This patient journey map serves as a guide for ensuring comprehensive care at every step of the breast cancer journey.

The holistic needs of BCF's breast cancer warriors and caretakers are:



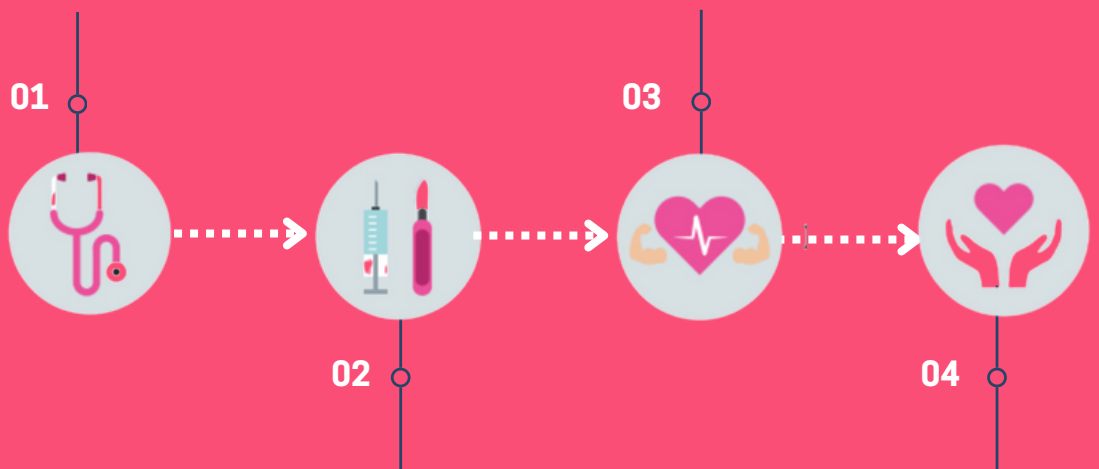
6. THE PATIENT JOURNEY

Detection & Diagnosis

Patients need substantial support to manage anxiety while awaiting test results and assistance in filtering through extensive information. They must cope with an overwhelming sense of loss and denial and undergo necessary tests for accurate diagnosis. A strong support system involving family, friends, and healthcare providers can significantly alleviate the emotional burden.

Rehabilitation

Patients need to focus on personal well-being and reintegrate into the workplace and community post-treatment. They must cope with mental challenges, build confidence, and manage after-effects of treatment. Dealing with symptoms like numbness and pain and exploring therapies to manage these effects are important, as is overcoming isolation due to perceived stigma.



Treatment & Surgery

Patients require guidance in choosing appropriate treatments and surgeries, along with firsthand information from other survivors. They must overcome the temptation to give up during treatment and cope with changes in self-esteem and body image post-surgery. Managing side effects like fatigue and reduced mobility is crucial, and support from family, friends, and the workplace is essential for recovery.

Palliative Care

Addressing individual physical needs and managing pain to prevent premature termination of treatment are vital. Patients must come to terms with the lack of curative options and manage feelings of isolation. Tailored care and effective management of severe side effects are essential, and maintaining companionship and support from friends, family, and healthcare providers enhances quality of life.

7.INSIGHTS DRAWN AND CURRENT PRACTICES

The consolidated insights from the BCF X Roche X SBHS Multi-Sectoral Stakeholder Workshop, aimed at improving health outcomes for Malay women with breast cancer, revealed a multi-faceted stock-take on the current and past initiatives targeted at the Malay community by our various stakeholders. Stakeholders representatives who participated in the workshop include BCF staff, patient advocates, medical professionals, patient organization leaders, and volunteers, all bringing valuable insights to the table.



"Education, early detection, and efficacy - these three ideals are crucial when it comes to reducing mortality rates of breast cancer. With lower screening rates, we are putting our women in the Malay-Muslim community at unnecessary risk. Our need to develop good screening habits, educate the masses, and ensure that policies are put in place is essential to protecting our communities from breast cancer."



-Dr Mikael Hartman

Committee & Medical Panel Member of BCF

Senior Consultant General, Breast & Endocrine Surgery, NUH

7.INSIGHTS DRAWN AND CURRENT PRACTICES

Emphasis on Detection and Diagnosis

- Importance of timely intervention and follow-up on screening results.
- Evaluation of initiatives aimed to inform future campaign designs and address community challenges effectively.

Lack of Awareness

- Malay women face a lack of awareness regarding breast cancer screening and detection methods.
- Importance of regular screenings may not be understood, leading to delayed diagnosis and poorer outcomes.

Cultural Beliefs & Stigma

- Cultural beliefs and stigma hinder health-seeking behaviors among Malay women.
- Misconceptions, fear of social ostracisation, and reluctance to discuss health openly contribute to delayed treatment.
- Efforts to address these issues include tailored outreach methods and leveraging community networks like mosques.

Targeted Outreach

- Collaboration with Malay-Muslim institutions and healthcare organisations identified as effective for educating the Malay-Muslim community about breast health practices.
- Focus on debunking myths and fostering a greater sense of community.

Engagement with Religious Leaders

- Partnering with religious leaders and influencers to promote awareness and destigmatise discussions about breast cancer within the Malay community.
- Religious institutions seen as trusted platforms for disseminating health information and encouraging early detection behaviors.

8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WAY FORWARD

I. BUILD A COLLABORATIVE NETWORK

The multi-sectoral engagement has the potential to serve as a node in fostering partnerships among healthcare providers, community organisations, government agencies and families to create a unified approach towards improving efforts for breast health among women in Singapore.

In this collaborative network, partners can meet periodically to share best practices, conduct ongoing evaluation and provide feedback on engagement efforts, and discuss, devise and adapt strategies based on community needs and evolving evidence in the field.

Based on extensive research and input from our partners, we find that education is a crucial part in overcoming these challenges. Some of these suggestions in the next few pages were raised at the multi-sectoral meeting, including past, ongoing and/or initiatives that are to be considered. Community networks act as the nodes for advancing concerted and community efforts on the ground, enabled by the partnership across sectors.



"Embracing my journey as a Muslim woman battling breast cancer, I dared to break through walls of stigma with the warmth of faith and the embrace of my community. Yes, I do wear a Hijab, and yes, I am here to talk about breasts. Our Malay-Muslim communities have traditions that we adhere to and that we abide by, but at the same time when it comes to self-care and health screenings, we can do a lot more to support our fellow women."

-Aisha Jiffry

Breast Cancer Warrior
BCF Advocate



8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WAY FORWARD

II. ENHANCE AWARENESS AND EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY

School-Based Education Programmes

Collaborate with schools and educational institutions to incorporate breast cancer awareness and prevention education into the curriculum. By reaching young Malay women early, we can instil lifelong habits of proactive health management and early detection.



Community Workshops and Seminars

Organise culturally sensitive workshops and seminars on breast health and cancer awareness targeted specifically at Malay women. These sessions can cover topics such as the importance of breast self-examination, risk factors for breast cancer, and the benefits of regular screening.

Art Therapy and Wellness Activities

Introduce art therapy workshops, mindfulness sessions, and wellness activities that promote relaxation, self-expression, and self-care. These activities can serve as valuable outlets for Malay women to process their emotions, alleviate stress, and enhance their overall well-being, which is what BCF is currently doing through our Healing Through the Arts service catered towards our members, with activities ranging from art workshops to yoga sessions.

Counselling and Support Groups:

Offer more counselling services and support groups tailored to the cultural and linguistic needs of Malay women with breast cancer. These groups provide a safe space for individuals to express their emotions, share concerns, and receive guidance from trained counsellors and peers, much like the various support groups BCF has to help support its members.

Mammobus Opportunities

Deploying mammobuses directly at mosques and underserved Malay communities, we will be able to provide convenient access to mammograms and clinical breast examinations. By bringing screening services directly to the community, we can overcome barriers related to insecurities, transportation, and healthcare facility access.

8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WAY FORWARD

III. WIDEN OUTREACH WITH CULTURALLY-COMPETENT IMPLEMENTATION

Cultural Sensitivity Training:

There is synergistic value in working with the Malay-Muslim healthcare network to develop targeted and culturally-informed initiatives. Offering cultural sensitivity training to healthcare professionals enhances their understanding of Malay cultural norms, beliefs, and practices related to health and illness. By fostering greater cultural competence, healthcare providers can deliver more personalised and empathetic care to Malay patients.

IV. PERSON-CENTRED PATIENT ADVOCACY

Peer Support Groups:

A potential way of encouraging more Malay women to develop strong breast health practices is to establish peer support groups at the grassroots level or even within their religious institutions. By working together with the community, we can help to establish peer support groups for Malay women diagnosed with breast cancer, providing emotional support, practical guidance, and shared experiences. Peer support networks can help alleviate feelings of isolation and empower women to navigate their cancer journey with resilience and confidence.

Caregivers:

The workshop also acknowledged the role of caregivers, highlighting the need for informative collateral and support programs tailored to their needs. This includes training for caregivers to manage symptoms and provide emotional support.

9. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Malay women with breast cancer face a myriad of challenges that can significantly impact their treatment outcomes and overall well-being, due to a complex interplay of cultural factors, socioeconomic barriers, and low awareness of or misinformation about the healthcare services and treatment options. As a result, many Malay women are diagnosed at later stages, leading to more aggressive treatment requirements and poorer prognosis.

“Stigma surrounding breast cancer makes it tough to talk about diagnosis”

“Expenses for treatment can be overwhelming”

“Cultural norms and gender roles may influence decision-making within families”

Participants agree that tackling these challenges needs a bold, multisectoral approach: raising awareness, enhancing healthcare access, offering culturally sensitive support, and addressing socioeconomic disparities. Healthcare providers, policymakers, community leaders, and advocacy groups must join forces to ensure Malay women with breast cancer get the care and support they need. This workshop marks the start of an informal coalition of stakeholders committed to improving outcomes for these women.

Moving forward, BCF aims to:

- **Compile a discovery inventory of projects and initiatives led by members of the coalition**
- **Collaborate with government agencies and existing initiatives to draw insights and boost current practices.**
- **Explore collaborations with stakeholders in the coalition**
- **Organise annual coalition meeting/workshop**

10. CLOSING NOTES



Nurliyana Daros

Executive Committee Member,
The Society of Behavioural Health Singapore

The Society of Behavioural Health is proud to support and facilitate the multisectoral engagement approach initiated by the Breast Cancer Foundation alongside Roche. This initiative represents an important step forward in the collaborative effort to increase public awareness and interest in enhancing breast cancer care.

Breast cancer presents profound and multifaceted challenges that reverberate through various aspects of a woman's life, not only physical health but also psychosocial well-being. A 2023 publication by The Lancet on global trends and forecasts of breast cancer underscores the pressing need for comprehensive cancer prevention and control strategies,¹⁰ highlighting that the global burden of disease for breast cancer is attributable to a comprehensive inventory of metabolic and behavioural risks. In Singapore, multi-level determinants of breast cancer screening were studied among Malay-Muslim women with the lowest uptake rate and highest breast cancer mortality rate. The study found determinants that cut across interpersonal, community and ¹¹environmental factors that call for the co-design of interventions with multiple stakeholders in the community.

At the Society of Behavioural Health (SBHS), we recognise the crucial role of social and behavioural health determinants in improving timely detection and treatment outcomes. Multistakeholder engagement enables a collaborative and holistic approach to design and advocate for support systems that are behaviourally and culturally informed to meet the diverse needs of women living with breast cancer. Through fostering open communication across stakeholders, we can continue to learn, improve, and explore new ways to provide a supportive environment that helps women with breast cancer navigate their journey with dignity and resilience. Together, we can make meaningful strides in enhancing the quality of life for these women and their loved ones.

¹⁰ Xu, Y., Gong, M., Wang, Y. et al. Global trends and forecasts of breast cancer incidence and deaths. *Sci Data* 10, 334 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-023-02253-5>

¹¹ Goh, S.A., Lee, J.K., Seh, W.Y. et al. (n8)

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Disclaimer: The opinions, commentaries, and expressions within this report are based on the discussions and insights shared during the workshop held earlier this year. They do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the organisation or partners as a whole. The content is intended to provide a summary of the workshop's proceedings and the required next steps, and may include subjective interpretations and perspectives of the participants.



We thank you for your continued support and participation.