

Novartis launches a ‘Wellness Day’ scheme – Encouraging employees to check-in on their health and set new community behaviours

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- All Novartis employees encouraged to take a day off work to schedule potentially life-saving health-screen check
- For every health screening completed – Novartis will donate \$5 to both local cancer charities Pink Hope and McGrath Foundation
- Scheme born from worrying statistics on the long-term impact of COVID-19 on people’s health from avoiding routine check-ups

This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Novartis Australia will set-up a collaboration with Pink Hope with the creation of a unique initiative that aims to get the community back into scheduling regular health checks. We are proud to announce the company’s new ‘Wellness Day’ scheme – a day that allows all Novartis employees to get a health-screen check before 31st December 2020.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far-reaching – and will have very significant implications on the future of Australian’s general health. Statistics show a significant drop in the general population scheduling routine check-ups, health screens and diagnostic tests – out of fear for contracting the deadly virus.

This has inevitably resulted in thousands of people missing crucial early diagnoses – with potentially deadly consequences, as we know early detection is an important aspect of increasing the chance of survival.

The Cancer Council has revealed a 37% decrease in screening for breast cancer during COVID. This drop in early detection means that up to 8,000 women could potentially have breast cancer right now – but are unaware.¹ Additional data from Cancer Australia, the Federal Government’s peak cancer body, showed substantial drops in tests that diagnose three of the most common cancers (skin, breast and colorectal) in Australia between March and April, at the height of national lockdowns, as well as a drop in treatments for them.²

Experts fear the case will also be the same for heart disease – with males twice as likely to develop coronary heart disease, and the disease responsible for 1 in 4 deaths in Australia in 2018.³

Understanding the severity of the situation, Novartis decided to take action, and hope to spark a conversation around the importance of stimulating the community to re-engage with their healthcare professionals and attend regular check-ups.

For every health check completed, Novartis will donate \$5 to Pink Hope and the McGrath Foundation– two pivotal Australian charities undertaking significant work in supporting the breast cancer community. The completion of a health check therefore not only benefits the community – but provides valuable funds for these essential organisations, who are also struggling to keep their great work going with the current financial pressures.

The challenges of busy 21st century living often result in a delay of routine health checks and investment of time into self-care. This is why Novartis in collaboration with Pink Hope has created the 'Wellness Day' scheme – giving employees the time to concentrate on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Krystal Barter, Founder, Pink Hope, stated: "I am a passionate cancer and wellness advocate, inspiring and empowering people around the world to prioritise their health. Working with Novartis on their "Wellness Day" scheme aligns to not only Pink Hope's message, but my personal one. Use this as an opportunity to book in your wellness checks by visiting your GP, attending screenings, skin checks, mammograms and blood tests. It was a genetic test and mammogram that saved my life, so I hope this day can be your "prioritise your health day". Wellness is an investment, and I am proud to see Novartis put investment into the health of their employees."

This is a fantastic initiative and we are incredibly supportive of anything that aims to empower people to look after their own bodies, and to take action that promotes their health and wellbeing," said Holly Masters, CEO, McGrath Foundation.

"I encourage everyone to use their Wellness Day to get a health check-up and am calling on other business owners to provide the same opportunity for their employees – early detection can save lives," said Cheryl Maley, Managing Director, Novartis Oncology. "In our line of work as a healthcare company, we understand the impact that early diagnosis can have on your prognosis. Patients are at the centre of the work we do each day. To achieve our mission of improving and extending people's lives, we must also ensure our Novartis team is engaging and investing in their own health."

The 'Wellness Day' scheme is additionally supportive of and aligns with the #dontwaitmate campaign – created by the Continuity of Care Collaboration (CCC), a unique and first of its kind communication collaboration of over 35 Peak Bodies, Industry and Healthcare Organisations. The collaborative group have come together to stress the importance for people to continue with monitoring their health status and conditions to ensure optimal long term health outcomes are achieved.

What is a health screening check?

A health screening check is a necessity for protecting your health and preventing health issues and disease. It can involve an array of tests, which vary depending on many factors such as your age, sex, family history, environment and behaviours. Below are some of the routine checks ups that you can do during your Wellness Day, but please discuss with your GP or health care professional what is best suited to you:

- Breast Check
- Skin Check and mole mapping
- Cervical Screening Test
- Routine Blood test
- Prostate / Testicular Cancer Check
- Bowel Screening

Once health checks are completed, Novartis is asking employees to update their social media profiles – explaining why they have had a health check – pledging others to do the same. For every person that completes a wellness check during Breast Cancer Awareness Month (October 2020), Novartis will donate \$5 to both McGrath Foundation and Pink Hope (to a maximum of \$15,000).

Reference

1. Cancer Council (12 July 2020) Media Statement: Breast cancer notification down amid COVID-19

Pandemic

2. Cancer Australia. Review of the impact of COVID-19 on medical services and procedures in Australia utilising MBS data: Skin, breast and colorectal cancers, and telehealth services. Available online: <https://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/publications-and-resources/cancer-australia-publications/review-impact-covid-19-medical-services-and-procedures-australia-utilising-mbs-data-skin-breast-and>. Last accessed October 2020.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Cardiovascular disease. Available online: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/heart-stroke-vascular-diseases/cardiovascular-health-compendium/contents/how-many-australians-have-cardiovascular-disease>. Last accessed October 2020.

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- <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/heart-stroke-vascular-diseases/hsvd-facts/contents/about>