**Predict. Prevent. Act now: Why early breast cancer detection saves lives**

October is SA Breast Cancer Awareness Month

**JOHANNESBURG - Breast cancer remains the most common cancer among South African women and one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths. Yet, the message of hope is clear: early detection saves lives. In South Africa, Breast Cancer Awareness Month is observed in October every year, aligning with the global Breast Cancer Awareness Month.**

According to the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA), more than 19.4 million South African women over the age of 15 are at risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. Fortunately, thanks to advances in medicine and awareness, when detected and treated early, breast cancer survival rates are excellent, and outcomes continue to improve every year.

Modern technology, greater awareness, and improved screening tools such as mammography, have transformed the landscape of breast health. Regular check-ups and screening remain the cornerstone of prevention. At Medshield, we encourage all our members to stay informed, stay vigilant, and take proactive steps to protect their health.

**What is breast cancer?**

Breast cancer develops when abnormal cells in the breast grow uncontrollably, forming a lump or tumour. It most often begins in the milk ducts (ductal carcinoma) or the lobules that produce milk (lobular carcinoma). In its early stages, breast cancer may be small and confined, not yet life-threatening. However, if left untreated, it can spread to surrounding tissue or other parts of the body, requiring urgent intervention.

While women account for about 99% of all breast cancer cases, men are not immune. Male breast cancer makes up around 0.5 to 1% of all cases, and though rare, it carries the same risks and requires similar treatment approaches.

**Who is at risk?**

Breast cancer can affect anyone, but certain risk factors increase the likelihood. These include:

* Increasing age: Risk rises sharply after age 50.
* Obesity and harmful alcohol use: Both are linked to hormonal imbalances that can promote tumour growth.
* Family history: Having a close relative (mother, sister, or daughter) with breast cancer increases your risk, especially if diagnosed before age 50.
* Genetic mutations: Inherited mutations such as BRCA1 or BRCA2 significantly heighten lifetime risk.
* Radiation exposure is especially concerning for the chest area in youth or young adulthood.
* Tobacco use and postmenopausal hormone therapy may also play a role.

Importantly, most women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease. A clean family record does not mean you are risk-free. For those with known high-risk gene mutations, preventive strategies, such as medication, lifestyle changes, or even prophylactic surgery, can reduce the chance of developing the disease.

**What to watch out for**

Familiarity with your own body is one of the most straightforward yet powerful tools for early detection. Monthly breast self-exams help you notice subtle changes. Warning signs to watch for include:

* A new lump or area of thickened tissue in the breast or underarm.
* A nipple that becomes inverted or unusually flattened.
* Changes in skin colour (redness, pink or purple discolouration, or darker patches).
* Alterations in breast size, shape, or contour.
* Dimpling or puckering of the skin (an "orange peel" texture).
* Scaling, flaking, or peeling of the nipple or breast skin.
* Unexplained nipple discharge, especially if bloody or occurring from one breast only.

If you notice any of these symptoms, do not delay and consult your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

**Diagnosis and screening**

Mammography remains the gold standard for early detection. It is a safe, low-dose X-ray that can identify tumours long before you can feel them with your hand. Mammograms have been used reliably for over 50 years and can detect cancers early when treatment is most successful.

If a mammogram shows an abnormal area, your doctor may recommend further imaging, such as an ultrasound or MRI followed by a biopsy. Only a biopsy can confirm whether a growth is cancerous. Early detection allows for more treatment options and increases the chances of breast conservation (avoiding mastectomy). That is why regular screening, especially after age 40 or sooner, is so important.

**Treatment and the power of early detection**

Treatment for breast cancer depends on the type, size, and stage of the disease. It often involves a combination of:

* Surgery: To remove the tumour or affected tissue.
* Radiation therapy: To destroy remaining cancer cells.
* Chemotherapy, hormone therapy, or targeted therapy: To prevent recurrence or spread.

The success of treatment is strongly tied to how early the cancer is detected. When breast cancer is diagnosed at a localised stage, the five-year survival rate is around 99%. However, if it has spread to other organs (metastatic cancer), that rate drops to roughly 27%. This striking difference highlights why vigilance is key. Even if you have recently had a clear mammogram, stay alert to any changes. If something feels or looks different, act immediately — it could save your life.

**How to take charge**

* **Perform monthly self-exams**. Learn what is normal for your breasts so you can detect changes early.
* **Schedule routine screenings.** Ask your doctor about the proper screening schedule for your age and risk profile.
* **Adopt a healthy lifestyle.** Maintain a healthy weight, limit alcohol, avoid smoking, and stay active.
* **Know your family history**. If breast cancer runs in your family, talk to your doctor about genetic testing or enhanced screening.
* **Seek emotional support**. A diagnosis, or even the fear of one, can be overwhelming. Reach out to counselling or support groups for guidance and encouragement.

**Partnering with you for life**

At Medshield, we believe prevention and early action are the most potent forms of care. That is why in 2026 you will have access to a mammogram screening every year from the age of 30, covered from the Wellness Benefit. In addition, our comprehensive benefit options support members across every stage of health, from preventive screenings and specialist consultations to chronic condition management and mental-wellness care.

Remember: early detection gives you power — the power to choose, to heal, and to live fully.

**Predict. Prevent. Act Now.** Schedule your screening today and make breast health a lifelong priority.

**FIN**

(994 words)

**EDITORS NOTES**

**FURTHER MEDIA INFORMATION AND INTERVIEW REQUESTS**

* Stone issues this release on behalf of the Medshield Medical Scheme.
* For media enquiries or interview requests, please contact Willem Eksteen, CEO of Stone or a media liaison member of the Stone team at [media@stone.consulting](mailto:media@stone.consulting) / 011 447 0168
* Alternatively, contact Lilané Swanepoel at Medshield at 010 597 4982 / [lilanes@medshield.co.za](mailto:lilanes@medshield.co.za)

**MORE INFORMATION ON THE 2025 MEDSHIELD BENEFIT OPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Benefits and Contribution amendments are subject to CMS approval.

Please refer to the 2025 Product Page on the Medshield website at [https://medshield.co.za](https://medshield.co.za/).

You can review the benefit adjustments, and value adds and download the 2025 benefit guides by visiting <https://medshield.co.za/2025-products/2025-benefit-options/> or by scanning the relevant QR code:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Benefit package and descriptor** | **QR code to view more detail** |
| **PremiumPlus** provides mature families and professionals with unlimited hospital cover in a hospital of their choice, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at 200% Medshield Private Tariff, and the freedom to manage daily healthcare expenses through a comprehensive Personal Savings Account and extended Above Threshold Cover. | A qr code with a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediBonus** provides mature families and professionals with unlimited hospital cover in a hospital of their choice, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at 200% Medshield Private Tariff, and the independence to manage daily healthcare expenses through a substantial Day-to-Day Limit. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediSaver** is perfect for independent individuals and young professionals thinking about expanding their families. MediSaver offers unlimited hospital cover in the Compact Hospital Network, with the freedom to manage daily healthcare expenses through a generous Personal Savings Account. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediPlus** provides middle to upper-income families with complete healthcare cover for major medical and daily healthcare needs. Unlimited hospital cover is provided through a choice of two hospital networks, Prime or the value-focused Compact Hospital Network. Daily healthcare expenses are covered through a generous Day-to-Day Limit. Benefits are identical in both categories, Prime and Compact, with care coordination and doctor referral mandated on MediPlus Compact. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediCore** is ideal for healthy individuals looking for comprehensive hospital cover, with daily healthcare expenses self-managed. This option offers unlimited hospital cover in the Compact Hospital Network, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at Medshield Private Tariff 200%. Day-to-day healthcare expenses are self-funded. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediValue** is the ideal option for growing families. It offers affordable cover for major medical and daily healthcare needs. Unlimited hospital cover is provided through a choice of two hospital networks, Prime or the value-focused Compact Hospital Network. Daily healthcare expenses are covered through a sizeable Day-to-Day Limit. Benefits are identical on both options, MediValue Prime and MediValue Compact, with care coordination and doctor referral mandated on MediValue Compact. | A qr code with a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediPhila** is ideal for families seeking first-time access to affordable private medical cover. As a MediPhila member, you have full cover for Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB) treatment plus R1 million per family for non-PMB In-Hospital treatment in the MediPhila Hospital Network. Coupled with this is Day-to-Day cover for your essential daily healthcare needs. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediCurve** If you are tech-savvy, young and healthy, then MediCurve is the ideal first-time option for you! MediCurve provides generous hospital cover in the MediCurve Hospital Network combined with unlimited virtual Family Practitioner consultations and essential optical and dental cover through network providers | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |

**MORE ABOUT MEDSHIELD MEDICAL SCHEME**

* You never know when you or your family member/s may require medical care or treatment, and most importantly, whether you will have funds available to cover the costs. Medshield is a healthcare fund where all members contribute to the fund every month to cater for medical coverage should the need arise. Medshield is a healthcare fund where all members contribute towards the fund monthly to cater for medical cover should the need arise.
* Medshield has been in operation since 1968, making us one of the most experienced, knowledgeable, and reliable medical schemes in South Africa. Our extensive experience in the healthcare sector guides our understanding of our members' needs. Our excellent cover and benefits and the best quality systems and services have resulted in our exceptional size and strength.
* Each of our options offers affordably priced benefits. We continuously review and improve the range of benefits in each option to bring you what you need.
* We partner with our stakeholders to enable access to sustainable and **affordable quality healthcare** through innovative products and benefits.
* Our impeccable reputation of prompt payments to hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and other medical caregivers guarantees approval from service providers when you present your Medshield membership card.
* Our extensive partner networks place us in the perfect position to offer exceptionally competitive rates to our members.
* Medshield is well-represented throughout all nine provinces and provides seamless access to service providers in your area. Our geographical spread provides convenience if it becomes necessary for you to have a personal discussion with one of our experienced consultants. We also have a streamlined online claim submission system and immediate contact centre assistance, making it easier to manage your membership and claims from the convenience of your home or office.
* Another distinguishing factor is our extensive range of additional benefits and services. These benefits and services have been designed to give members additional support when needed, for instance, in an emergency or when suffering from a chronic or life-threatening condition.
* Compared with other medical schemes, our trustworthiness, impeccable history, and exceptional service guarantee that we come out tops!
* As the interface between the Scheme and our members, Medshield staff are the backbone of our customer service delivery. The successful delivery of service depends entirely on the calibre of our people.