

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Counterpart celebrates 20 years of peer support – women supporting women with cancer**

**MELBOURNE – 23 MAY 2023**

Women's Health Victoria is delighted to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Counterpart – a highly unique peer support cancer service that connects and supports women – with a celebratory event to be attended by the Victorian Health Minister, Hon Mary-Anne Thomas, when it is held at Queen Victoria's Women's Centre on Thursday 25 May 2023.

More than 100 women living with cancer, dedicated staff and volunteers of Counterpart, a statewide service funded by the Victorian Government, will attend the event. It is the first in a series of events to mark the anniversary year with several wellness days planned for regional Victorian cities throughout the year.

Women's Health Victoria Chief Executive, Dianne Hill said Counterpart is truly unique due to the long-standing involvement of volunteers, some of whom have contributed up to 20 years to the service and all of whom have experienced cancer themselves.

“Our highly trained and professional Peer Support Volunteers offer emotional support, understanding, hope and comfort. We have had 168 volunteers, who have provided over 29,000 hours of peer support and volunteering. They have provided quality peer support and information to women with cancer over 40,000 times since it started in 2003.”

Rhonda Cole has been a Peer Support Volunteer since the service first opened its doors in 2003. “20 years of volunteering at Counterpart has given me confidence and the strength to deal with my own cancer diagnoses but also to share the knowledge I have gained with other women with cancer; not only informing them but giving them hope for their future,” Ms Cole said. “They know we offer a safe space where they can talk about their fears, anger and shock of a cancer diagnosis. It means they will be heard.”

Counterpart Manager, Cindy Van Rooy said Counterpart supports women with cancer from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond.

“Counterpart's Peer Support Volunteers have lived experience of cancer and provide peer support over the phone and in person, including at hospitals. We run events, including webinars and in-person workshops, and connect women with reliable, evidence-based information. Importantly, Counterpart's services are free and confidential.

“Every woman's experience of cancer is different but talking to another woman who has had cancer can help. We are a statewide service providing phone support, webinars and regional events, so we can support women with cancer no matter where they live,” Ms Van Rooy said.

In July 2022, Counterpart expanded its services to women affected by any type of cancer. Previously Counterpart was focused on supporting women with breast and gynaecological cancers. Counterpart collaborates with other cancer services to increase access to supportive care, in line with Action area 4: Wellbeing and support, in the Victorian Cancer Plan 2020–2024.

**Media inquiries** - For media inquiries, please contact Counterpart Communications Coordinator Katherine Bradstreet 0421 636 697 [katherine.bradstreet@counterpart.org.au](mailto:katherine.bradstreet@counterpart.org.au)

**Available for interview:**

Women's Health Victoria, Chief Executive, Dianne Hill.  
Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer, Rhonda Cole

**Event details:**

When: Thursday 25 May, 5.00 – 7.00pm

Where: Wayi Djerring (4th floor) at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre (210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne Vic 3000).

RSVP via email [cindy.vanrooy@counterpart.org.au](mailto:cindy.vanrooy@counterpart.org.au), including any dietary requirements

**About Women's Health Victoria**

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, statewide women's health promotion, advocacy and support service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV collaborates with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. Our work is informed by a feminist approach to health promotion and the social determinants of health.

For more information, visit [whv.org.au](http://whv.org.au)

**About Counterpart**

Counterpart is a service of Women's Health Victoria. Counterpart is supported by the Victorian Government. For more information, visit <https://counterpart.org.au/>

**– Ends –**