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## Australian Breakthrough Aims to Halt Breast Cancer Recurrence for Thousands

August 7, 2025

– Categories: *Breaking News*



A \$25 million research project, funded by the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF), seeks to halve breast cancer recurrence by targeting dormant cancer cells, offering hope to survivors like Colette Chase. Led by the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, the AllClear program involves 60 researchers across Australia, Yale, and Washington universities to study why these cells “wake up” and how to eliminate them. The initiative, reported by The Age, addresses the emotional and financial toll on taxpayers, who fund healthcare for the 21,000 Australians diagnosed annually, emphasizing the need for effective prevention to reduce public costs.

Despite improved survival rates, about 15% of breast cancer patients face recurrence within 10 years, often fatally, as cancer “seeds” hide in bones for years, per The Age. The AllClear project, led by Associate Professor Christine Chaffer, uses new technology to detect and study these cells, aiming to develop targeted therapies. Professor Peter Croucher, co-director of the Cancer Plasticity and Dormancy Program at Garvan, stated, “Studying these ‘seeds’ of relapse will allow us to understand what is driving recurrence, which could transform how breast cancer is understood and treated,” with potential applications for other cancers, per The Age. Clinical trials will run alongside research to deliver real-time benefits.

The fear of recurrence burdens survivors, driving up healthcare costs borne by taxpayers. Colette Chase, a 51-year-old water industry worker, shared, “You just live in a ball of anxiety,” highlighting the emotional strain, per The Age. Joanne Gilson, diagnosed in 2021, echoed this, noting, “You’re constantly living with ‘what does that mean? Is it metastasis, what’s going on?’” The uncertainty fuels frequent check-ups, with Australia’s Medicare spending \$1.2 billion annually on cancer care, per Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data. Preventing recurrence could ease this financial load, ensuring public funds are used efficiently.

The AllClear project, involving the Universities of Sydney and Newcastle, aims to predict which patients are at risk and eliminate dormant cells before they activate. Professor Nicholas Huntington from Monash University’s Biomedicine Discovery Institute (BDI), not part of the project, said, “They’ll be able to develop pathways that would be druggable, to help eradicate these cells in bone marrow,” per The Age. NBCF Chief Executive Dr. Cleola Anderiesz noted the project’s potential to “unlock insights for other cancers,” reducing the 3,300 annual breast cancer deaths by nine daily, per NBCF data. This could lower taxpayer-funded treatment costs for metastatic cases, which average \$50,000 per patient, per AIHW.

Survivors like Chase, who faced triple-negative metaplastic cancer, and Gilson, a mother of three, emphasize the need for certainty. Chase said, “That assumption you’re going to live to a certain age is taken away,” per The Age, underscoring the loss of control. The project’s patient-driven design aims to address this, but its success depends on delivering measurable outcomes. With breast cancer costing Australia \$1 billion annually in direct and indirect costs, per AIHW, taxpayers deserve accountability in research investments. The AllClear initiative’s promise to reduce recurrence offers hope, but it must translate into

tangible results to justify public funding and alleviate the burden on survivors and the healthcare system.