

Promoting screening attendance and self-checks is at the heart of our year-long campaign being run in association with Breast Cancer Now Scotland

Breast Cancer Now's director for Scotland Mary Allison said: "We are delighted to be partnering with the Scottish Women's Institutes – especially during its centenary year - to help spread awareness on the importance of detecting breast cancer early.

"Most cases of breast cancer are found by women noticing unusual changes. The message is out there, but when half of the women in Scotland still aren't checking themselves regularly, we know we need to do even more."

Our drive has been endorsed by comedienne and actress Elaine C Smith, a vocal campaigner on breast cancer awareness, who believes the SWI can work as a mighty force in speaking up for the need for all women to undertake screening and self-examination.

Elaine said: "We need to ensure that we take as much of the fear and terror out of looking after ourselves and get the message out there that the earlier we check and detect any changes, the better. We're saving our own lives.

"The best thing that has happened to me in my life are the women who come up to me and tell me that the campaign I'm involved in made them go and insist on treatment and with the help of doctors, scientists, surgeons and nurses their lives have been saved. That's better than an Oscar any day.

"I just wish my own mum had seen a campaign like it. Sadly she died from breast cancer in 2005 at only 71. It's our job to save as many mums out there as we can, so get on with it girls!"

Around 1,000 women in Scotland die of breast cancer every year. The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed and treated, the greater the chances of survival so it is vital that women are breast aware.

Breast Cancer Now's app for mobile devices was launched to encourage women to get into the habit of checking themselves.

Regular mammograms, offered to women in Scotland between the ages of 50 and 70, can help find breast cancer at an early stage, when treatment is most likely to be successful. A mammogram can find breast changes that could be cancer years before physical symptoms develop.

Not every woman takes up the invitation to attend screening. We want to encourage SWI members to become buddies to female family and friends who may be reluctant to attend, by offering reassurance and support and accompanying them for breast screening when the unit visits their area.

Many Institutes already knit prosthetics for women awaiting reconstruction surgery. We'd love to see more getting involved during 2017 but there are lots of other ways to support the campaign.

Why not consider taking up a pink theme - pink being the international symbol for breast cancer awareness. Things like fashion shows in the pink, crafting in the pink, baking in the pink, or bringing the theme into competitions, or speakers talking to members about breast cancer awareness could become part of meetings.

For 100 years, the SWI has supported women living in communities across Scotland, acting as a force for the good through friendship, education and awareness, making this partnership with Breast Cancer Now most fitting for the centenary year.

Christine Hutton, national chairman of the SWI, encouraged members to get involved and support early detection, be breast aware and offer support to members, relatives and friends in their communities too.

Christine said: "As one of the largest women's organisations in Scotland many of our members will have been affected by breast cancer.

"This is an area where we can make a difference and I would encourage members to get behind this very important cause during our centenary year.

"Breast Cancer Now is available to speak at Institute meetings to raise awareness. Members may also wish to become involved by knitting prosthetic breasts for those awaiting reconstruction surgery. The statistics are very encouraging showing the increase in survival rates."

Has cancer touched your life? Throughout 2017, and our campaign in partnership with Breast Cancer Now, we will be looking to find real life stories of how people have been impacted by the disease. Share your story with us at magazine@theswi.org.uk

Get the App

Breast Cancer Now's new Breast Check Now app is designed to help women set a reminder to check their breasts and establish a potentially lifesaving habit.

The charity says that almost half (44%) of all women in Scotland are not regularly checking for the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, the top reason for not checking regularly being simply because they forget (51%).

Breast Cancer Now's Director for Scotland Mary Allison said: "This year, in Scotland alone, around 4,600 women will receive a diagnosis of breast cancer and almost 1,000 will lose their lives to the disease. Checking your breasts regularly – at least once a month - could save your life. The earlier you find breast cancer the greater the likelihood of a better outcome.

"The biggest challenge is that many women still have not developed a habit of regular checking. With our Breast Check Now campaign we want to remind women in Scotland that checking matters and we want to give them the right tools to make this easier.

"By downloading our free Breast Check Now app you don't have to worry about remembering as it will help you create a habit of regular checking that fits with your life."

The free app, available for both Apple and Android devices, encourages women to set up a checking routine that fits around their lifestyle. It also provides information on what to look for, giving them the confidence to know what is normal for their body and encouraging them to visit their GP with any concerns.

For further information about Breast Cancer Now visit breastcancernow.org and to download the app search 'Breast Check Now' in Google Play or the App Store