MEDIA RELEASE

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MECCA backs BRAIx to bring AI powered breast cancer detection into screening programs across Australia

A world-leading, Australian-developed artificial intelligence program, called BRAIx, designed to make breast cancer screening more accurate, personalised and efficient has been given a major boost via a philanthropic gift from Australia's leading prestige beauty retailer MECCA, reflecting MECCA's long-standing commitment to initiatives that deliver sustained, positive change for women and girls.

MECCA, through its social change arm, MECCA M-POWER, will provide $500,000 in catalytic funding to fast-track implementation of the BRAIx AI developments into a product platform to serve breast cancer screening programs, benefiting Australian women and saving more lives. This support comes on the back of an additional $1 million in philanthropic funding by MECCA towards real world prospective studies and a randomised controlled trial currently underway in Victoria and South Australia.

The BRAIx program is a partnership led by A/Prof Helen Frazer from St Vincent's BreastScreen Melbourne with computational biologist Associate Professor Davis McCarthy from St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research (SVI), and others from St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, SVI, The University of Melbourne, The University of Adelaide and BreastScreen Victoria, and is funded by the Medical Research Future Fund.

BRAIx aims to transform breast cancer screening by combining Australian-built AI with radiologist expertise to detect cancers earlier, reduce unnecessary recalls, and tailor screening to each woman's needs. The BRAIx tool can both read mammograms with accuracy comparable to specialist radiologists and generate a powerful four-year risk score that predicts future cancer risk more accurately than traditional factors such as age, breast density or family history.

By identifying women at highest risk, including those with a nearly 10% chance of diagnosis within four years despite a previous all-clear, BRAIx has the potential to deliver risk-based screening designed to save more lives.

The BRAIx team is ensuring Australian AI capabilities are developed for use in our health system with the algorithm development, training and validation using millions of mammogram images from BreastScreen Victoria. This avoids dependency on international technology companies and algorithms, which hollow out Australian clinical and technical capabilities.

The BRAIx detection algorithm is currently in a large scale Randomised Controlled Trial in BreastScreen Victoria and will launch soon in BreastScreen South Australia. In simulation and evaluation studies, AI-assisted pathways reduced unnecessary recalls by up to ~10.9% and cut radiologist reading workload by ~50%, while maintaining or improving cancer detection.

The BRAIx risk score – developed using ~400,000 Australian screening exams, tested in ~96,000 more, and confirmed in an international cohort – more accurately estimated four-year breast cancer risk than commonly used factors. Women in the top 2% risk band had a 9.7% probability of diagnosis within four years despite a prior all-clear. This was recently published in *The Lancet Digital Health* and highlights the model's power to pinpoint women who may benefit from earlier or more frequent imaging.

Professor Tom Kay, Director, St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research:

"MECCA have given generously over the years to advance the BRAIx program. We would not be where we are today without their significant contribution. Now, with MECCA's catalytic funding, our teams can move BRAIx from world-class algorithms to a patient-ready solution improving outcomes for women across the country and beyond."

Lisa Keenan, Chief Purpose Officer, MECCA:

“MECCA M-POWER backs bold, practical solutions that improve the lives of women and girls. BRAIx is exactly that: a proven Australian innovation with the potential for global impact. We’re proud to support Helen Frazer, SVI and partners to bring it to the community.”

Associate Professor Helen Frazer, Clinical Director, St Vincent’s BreastScreen:

“Screening saves lives, but we can do it better. By combining expert radiologists with AI, we can detect cancers earlier, reduce unnecessary recalls and personalise screening based on risk.”

Associate Professor Davis McCarthy, Bioinformatics & Cellular Genomics Lab Head, St Vincent’s Institute of Medical Research:

“Training and validating BRAIx on Australian data means better accuracy, transparency and trust. This investment accelerates the technical, clinical and regulatory work that takes AI from promising research to safer, smarter screening in practice.”

For more information on SVI visit: www.svi.edu.au/

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About SVI and the BRAIx Consortium

SVI is a leading Australian medical research institute translating discovery into better prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease. BRAIx brings together SVI, St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne and BreastScreen Victoria with the University of Melbourne and the Australian Institute for Machine Learning (University of Adelaide) and is supported by the Medical Research Future Fund.

About MECCA and MECCA M-POWER

Since opening the doors to its very first store in Melbourne in 1997, MECCA has completely redefined the Australian beauty landscape, championing retail innovation and delivering the ultimate beauty experience to customers. MECCA has grown to become Australia’s largest prestige beauty retailer, serving more than four million customers each year. With over 110 stores across Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) and online, MECCA offers an exclusive edit of the best in beauty from more than 200 brands. Today, MECCA has a growing team of 7,000 spread across its Support Centre, Distribution Centre and store network, all working towards a shared purpose of helping people to look, feel, and be their best. From the very beginning, MECCA’s team has shared a passion for education and equality. MECCA’s social change program, MECCA M-POWER, was established in 2017. With a focus on philanthropic giving and impact across three pillars – education, women’s health and the arts – MPOWER exists to advance gender equality.