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# Breast 'tests' could offer false sense of security

**Jill Stark**

CANCER specialists warn that private clinics offering unproven breast screening methods as a "safe" alternative to mammograms could be putting women's lives at risk.

Clinics selling botox, liposuction and spray tans are increasingly providing breast cancer screening that uses thermal imaging and "electrical impedance" technology.

The methods are being marketed to women as young as 20, with claims they can detect cancer years earlier than mammograms.

Experts say the technologies are not backed by sufficient scientific evidence and those offering the tests often have little medical training.

In many cases no doctor's referral is required and there are concerns that potentially life-threatening cancers could go undetected.

The education and research director with the Cancer Council WA, Terry Slevin, said commercially driven breast-check clinics were popping up around Australia.

"There's a prospect of women

becoming very confused about what is or isn't proven, valid, scientifically rigorous breast cancer screening and I worry that that will lead to some women being diagnosed with breast cancer at a much more advanced, dangerous stage than might have otherwise been the case if they'd used more reliable technologies," Mr Slevin said.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration has already removed two screening devices from its list of registered medical goods, for making unsubstantiated claims.

Another two companies using similar products are under investigation but cannot be named for legal reasons.

The Cancer Council and the Australian Medical Association say the industry's "aggressive" advertising is misleading and have written to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission asking them to also take action against clinics.

The letter includes complaints against one centre which, as well as offering spray tans, facials and laser therapy, provides "digital infrared thermal imaging", which it

claimed could "improve early detection of breast disease by showing thermal abnormalities present in the body".

Unlike a mammogram, in which the breast is compressed between two plates and an X-ray taken, a thermogram does not require contact with the imaging machine.

A spokeswoman for the Therapeutic Goods Administration said mammography was the only breast examination technique that had been supported by objective, randomised clinical trials.

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Terry Slevin, Cancer Council