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PRESS RELEASE

**\$2 million additional funding to increase
mammography screenings for lower-income women**

Singapore, 9 April 2014 – Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) is providing \$2 million to extend the BCF Encouragement for Active Mammograms (BEAM15) programme to fund up to 40,000 free screening mammograms, over the next five years.

2. The BEAM15 programme, an initiative by BCF in collaboration with the Health Promotion Board (HPB), is aimed at improving breast cancer screening uptake among women from the lower income group. BCF's additional funding will supplement existing government subsidies to cover the full costs of screening mammograms for women attending first time screening and rescreens.

3. With an initial donation of over S\$300,000, BEAM15 was officially launched in March 2013. The fund, although originally intended to last for two years, was fully utilised within seven weeks from the start of the programme. Since the launch, more than 8000 women have been screened.

4. Singaporean women aged 50 years and above with valid Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) cards are eligible for BEAM15. To ensure that the initiative is effective in helping lower income women, HPB will work with BCF to reach out to right target group and ensure that they are aware of this initiative.

5. BEAM15 is part of a three-year roadmap outlined by the Women's Health Advisory Committee (WHAC) chaired by Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower. Dr Khor said, "Since its establishment in May 2012, the Women's Health Advisory Committee (WHAC) has reached out to more than 200,000 women. WHAC has worked with HPB in developing national initiatives that equip women with the knowledge and skills to look after their health at different stages of their life. One of our key priorities is to provide affordable cancer screening for women, especially those from lower-income groups. Breast cancer screening rates for women in Singapore is lower than that in OECD Countries. This is why I am very happy that through the successful collaboration between BCF and HPB, BEAM15 has benefitted more than 8000 lower income women since its launch in 2013."

6. She added, "If breast cancer is detected at an early stage and treated appropriately, the five-year survival rate goes up to 90 per cent; the later it is identified, the lower the survival rate. Since early stages of breast cancer may not show any signs, it is important for women to go for regular screening even if they feel well and their previous mammography result was normal."

7. BCF has established counselling and support programmes for women detected with breast cancer through BEAM15. Counselling support is available to patients' family members, partners and employers.

8. Mrs Noor Quek, President of BCF said, “We will be moving to our new premises at Leisure Park Kallang after 16 years at Dunearn Road. With a more convenient and accessible location, we hope to extend our reach by increasing the level of public awareness of breast cancer as well as support for patients and survivors. It is clear that our work here has only just begun but it is heartening to see how well received the BEAM15 project is. We will continue our efforts and outreach relentlessly, until we are able to empower as many women from lower income groups as possible, with the ability to make the choice to prioritise their health.” She added, “We have been fortunate to partner with HPB who has been pivotal in identifying and reaching the lower income women, bringing this project to a successful start.”

9. “Breast cancer is the number one killer among women with about 400 deaths per year from 2008 to 2012. It is also the most common cancer among Singaporean women today, with an average of about 1,600 women diagnosed with breast cancer each year during the same period. This is why it is important to make breast cancer screening affordable and accessible to all Singaporean women. HPB’s BreastScreen Singapore (BSS), the national breast cancer screening programme offers such subsidised and convenient screening services. Besides these efforts, a HPB study found that fear plays a large role. This includes a fear of unpleasant results, the process, change and the loss of control in their lives. As a result, non-screeners avoid the action. Thus, BEAM15 represents our continuing efforts to address these concerns and develop customised programmes for all segments of society through partnerships with like-minded organisations such as BCF,” said Mr Zee Yoong Kang, Chief Executive Officer of HPB.

10. Breast cancer is the top female cancer in Singapore, accounting for 29 per cent of all cancers among women for the period 2008 to 2012ⁱ. Recent research has shown that survival rates are highest when breast cancers are diagnosed early via screeningⁱⁱ. Subsidised screening is available to all Singaporean women aged 50 years and above through BreastScreen Singapore, the national breast cancer screening programme.

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About Breast Cancer Foundation

Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) is a non-profit organisation set up in 1997 with the mission to eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease. BCF propagates awareness and education through talks, events, exhibitions and publications and advocates early detection through regular screening. Support and volunteer programmes are organised for patients, survivors, family members, caregivers and volunteers through counselling, training, empowerment and healing through the arts activities. BCF is one of the few breast cancer advocacy groups in the world with a Men’s Support League to emphasise men’s role in society’s fight against this affliction.

About the Health Promotion Board

The Health Promotion Board was established as a statutory board under the Ministry of Health, Singapore, in 2001 with the vision of building “A Nation of Healthy People”. HPB aims to empower the people of Singapore to attain optimal health, increase the quality and years of healthy life and prevent illness, disability and premature death. As the key driver of national health promotion and disease prevention programmes, HPB spearheads health education, promotion and prevention programmes as well as creates a health-supportive environment in Singapore. It develops and organises relevant health promotion and disease prevention programmes, reaching out to the healthy, the at-risk and the unhealthy at all stages of life – children, youths, adults and older Singapore residents. Its health promotion programmes include nutrition, mental health, physical activity, smoking control and



communicable disease education. HPB also promotes healthy ageing, integrated health screening, and chronic disease education and management.

ⁱ Singapore Cancer Registry Interim Annual Registry Report. Trends in Cancer Incidence in Singapore 2008 to 2012. Available from:

https://www.nrdo.gov.sg/uploadedFiles/NRDO/Cancer_Trends_Report_08-12_website.pdf [Last accessed: 14 March 2014]

ⁱⁱ Goldman AJ and Phillips N. Breast cancer survival and prognosis by screening history. British Journal of Cancer. 2014;110:556-559. Available from <http://www.nature.com/bjc/journal/v110/n3/full/bjc2013732a.html> [Last accessed: 14 March 2014]

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