



**Debbie
Packham**
SMICS
Consumer
Representative

Tell us about yourself and how you came to be a consumer?

My name is Debbie Packham and I'm a 62 year old breast cancer survivor. I'm a mother of two beautiful grown up boys, I love chocolate, great tasting food and horses.

In 2016 on the Melbourne Cup weekend, I discovered a lump in my breast. Thinking it was caused by the wire in my bra, I ignored it for a week or two until I was sick with a cold and sore throat. My amazing GP was much more interested in the lump than my cold. Within 3 days, I was diagnosed with aggressive HR positive breast cancer. I had my first chemo in December and also had a PET scan. It was a shock to be told on Christmas Eve that I also had cancer in my sacrum. After eight rounds of chemo three weeks apart, two surgeries which included a mastectomy, radiation, special (Sabre) radiation on my sacrum, and an additional diagnosis of inflammatory breast cancer, there is currently no evidence of cancer. Amazing.

Once I discovered I had this nasty disease, I decided that I would live my life as normally as possible during treatment and that the cancer and treatment were part of who I am but not *all I am*. I worked during most of my treatment with heaps of support from my family, friends, work colleagues and all the amazing medical people who did their very best for me.

What is your connection to your ICS?

I've been involved in several SMICS workshops. The 2021 Annual Forum and most recently on the panel selecting the latest innovative SMICS grants. One of my breast care nurses asked me if I'd be interested in contributing to SMICS and

other Monash projects and committees. I gladly accepted as I felt this was an opportunity for me to give and help others.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your role(s)?

It is my pleasure and privilege to be involved with SMICS and other consumer committees. This role provides opportunities to make other people's cancer experiences just that little bit easier. It allows me to meet amazing medical professionals who want to make our treatment better and more successful as well as less stressful. I'm grateful for the opportunities I've been given to make a positive contribution to better, and more patient centred care. I've had the chance to be listened to and I really hope that my contributions have helped others.

What is it about being a consumer that makes you smile?

Being given the responsibility, chance and opportunity to improve treatment and outcomes for other cancer patients. It makes me smile when what I have to say is listened too, and acted upon.

What does a typical day look like for you?

I am currently working in a primary school as the Library Manager which takes up most of my working week. However, I am also involved in my local Australian Plants Society having recently co-organised their Annual Native Flower Show and plant sale, and I'm also learning how to drive Clydesdale horses. I'm loving spending time with the Clydesdales and that makes me smile a lot. Twice a week I go to a gym class run by physiotherapists which is designed to increase my bone density which has reduced having taken Letrozole for past five years.

How do you manage work / life balance?

I'm actually wondering how well my work and life is balanced. I'm feeling that it's almost time to do more of my life interests and less of the work. Being involved as a consumer within SMICS and other committees gives me another interest outside of work, and helps with the balance. I love the work that I do - inspiring young people to read is such an amazing feeling that it often doesn't actually feel like work.