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## Mastectomy's more common in rural areas

- **Anthony Brady**

WARRNAMBOOL researchers have found women in country areas are more likely to undergo a mastectomy than have breast-conserving surgery.

The findings come from a study by Associate Professor Ian Collins, Dr Caroline Lum and Associate Professor Vincent Versace from Deakin Rural Health in Warrnambool.

The research shows distance was the main predictor of breast cancer treatment methods after accounting for socioeconomic status and tumour size.



Breast-conserving surgery plus radiotherapy has become the standard of care for early-stage breast cancer.

However, women in rural areas are less likely to have this treatment than their counterparts in metropolitan areas, with a mastectomy more common.

“Improving access to radiotherapy has the potential to improve breast cancer outcomes for women in regional Australia,” Dr Collins said.

“Consistent with other studies, we found that distance to a radiotherapy centre significantly influenced surgery type.

“Patients 100-200km from treatment were 1.6 times more likely to opt for a mastectomy than those less than 100km from treatment.

“Now the South West Regional Cancer Centre is in place in Warrnambool, we expect and hope to see the rates of breast-conserving surgery with radiotherapy to improve and be more aligned with Geelong.”

The study covered the Barwon South West region and found that overall 59.3 per cent of women underwent breast-conserving surgery while 40.3 per cent had mastectomies.

These rates differed depending on distance to radiotherapy services.

Radiotherapy was available in Geelong during the study period and more women living closer to Geelong used the service.

The study did not find a statistically significant relationship between socio-economic status and treatment method, however Associate Professor Collins said a link could not be ruled out.