

Pap test message wins support from family left behind

Kate Hagan



Lucas Ellis with children Tayla and Hudson. Photo: Rodger Cummins

LUCAS Ellis wonders if the reason he lost his wife Melissa, 34, to cervical cancer might become clearer one day.

What he is sure about is that their children, Tayla, 12, and Hudson, 4, have "endured what no child of that age should - the loss of their mother".

He thinks Melissa's death in January was perhaps to help someone else, and wants "husbands, fathers, sons and brothers" to play a bigger role in encouraging women to have Pap tests to detect cervical cancer.

"I have a goal - that children like Tayla and Hudson should not have to go through this."

Mr Ellis spoke yesterday at the launch of a campaign encouraging women to have regular Pap tests, following research that showed younger women are not heeding the message.

The number of Australian women having Pap tests dropped to the lowest rate in a decade in 2008-09, when 61 per cent of women aged 20-69 had one - down from 67 per cent of women in 2001-02.

Pap Screen Victoria manager Kate Broun said only half of Australian women aged 20-29 were having a Pap test every two years - in line with national guidelines - compared with two in three older women.

She said nine out of 10 Victorian women diagnosed with cervical cancer had never had a Pap test, or had not had the test regularly in the decade before their diagnosis.

A survey of 1000 women found the biggest barrier was "overall embarrassment", reported by 28 per cent of women who had had a Pap test and 52 per cent of those who had not.

The campaign, funded by the state government, will target women aged 25 to 35. Advertisements compare Pap tests to leg waxing or dancing in high heels, with the catchline: "A little awkward for a lot of peace of mind."

It is a message supported by Mr Ellis, who said his wife had fought a "short but inspirational" battle with cervical cancer after being diagnosed in October last year.

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