

Radiotherapy

Skin Treatment



Illawarra & Shoalhaven
Cancer Care Centres



Health
Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

In this booklet

General information	2
Support services.....	3
My radiotherapy care team.....	4
Radiotherapy consultation	
Your pathway	7
What is orthovoltage	8
Treatment side effects	9
Radiotherapy planning	
Radiotherapy planning appointment	11
Radiotherapy planning	14
Radiotherapy treatment	
Radiotherapy treatment	15
Managing side effects	
Managing side effects	21
General skin care.....	22
After radiotherapy	
After radiotherapy	23
Frequently asked questions	
Frequently asked questions	25
Resources.....	29

General information



This booklet will help you with your journey through radiation treatment. The information is general and may not always apply to you. Please talk with your treating team if you have any questions.



IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Illawarra
Cancer Care
Ph: 4222 5200

Shoalhaven
Cancer Care
Ph: 4428 7400

Need an interpreter?

Professional interpreters are available if you need help to communicate in English, or if you are Deaf.

Our staff can also ask for an interpreter. The staff will book an interpreter for you. Interpreter Services are free and confidential.

You can bring a family member or friend with you to the appointment. If you need help to communicate it should be through a professional interpreter.

You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **1800 24 72 72** if you need to speak to us before an appointment.

Support services



There are a number of services available to help support both you and your family

- ☐ Counselling support for patients and carers affected by cancer
- ☐ Legal and financial assistance:
Cancer Council 13 11 20
www.canassist.com.au/
- ☐ Advance care planning/Advance care directive:
Making plans now for your future healthcare needs when you are no longer able to make decisions for yourself
- ☐ Travel & accommodation subsidy (IPTAAS):
If travelling more than 200km per week
www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/services/ipaas/ipaas-forms
- ☐ Mobility parking scheme:
Go to the website, download the form, see your GP, and go to your nearest Service NSW office.
www.service.nsw.gov.au
- ☐ Practical help in the home:
My Aged Care 1800 200 422
www.myagedcare.gov.au
Carer Gateway 1800 422 737
www.gateway.gov.au
Under 65-NDIS 1800 800 110
www.ndis.gov.au
- ☐ CANTEEN - support for young people 12-24 years.
- ☐ Centrelink - apply online for payments such as Jobseeker, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment or Carer Allowance.

If you require any more information or help please ask staff

My radiotherapy care team



Radiation oncologist

Contact: _____

What they do:

A doctor who prescribes radiotherapy and organises your treatment.

Radiation oncology registrar

Contact: _____

What they do:

A doctor who is training to be an oncologist. They are always supervised by your radiation oncologist.

Psychologist

Contact: _____

What they do:

A specialist who provides psychological assessment and interventions for cancer patients, and where required, to families and carers.

Radiation therapist

Contact: _____

What they do:

Specially trained to plan and deliver your treatment. They will also help support you through treatment.

Radiotherapy nurse

Contact: _____

What they do:

Specialise in caring for people having radiation therapy. They manage your side effects, and will help support you through treatment.

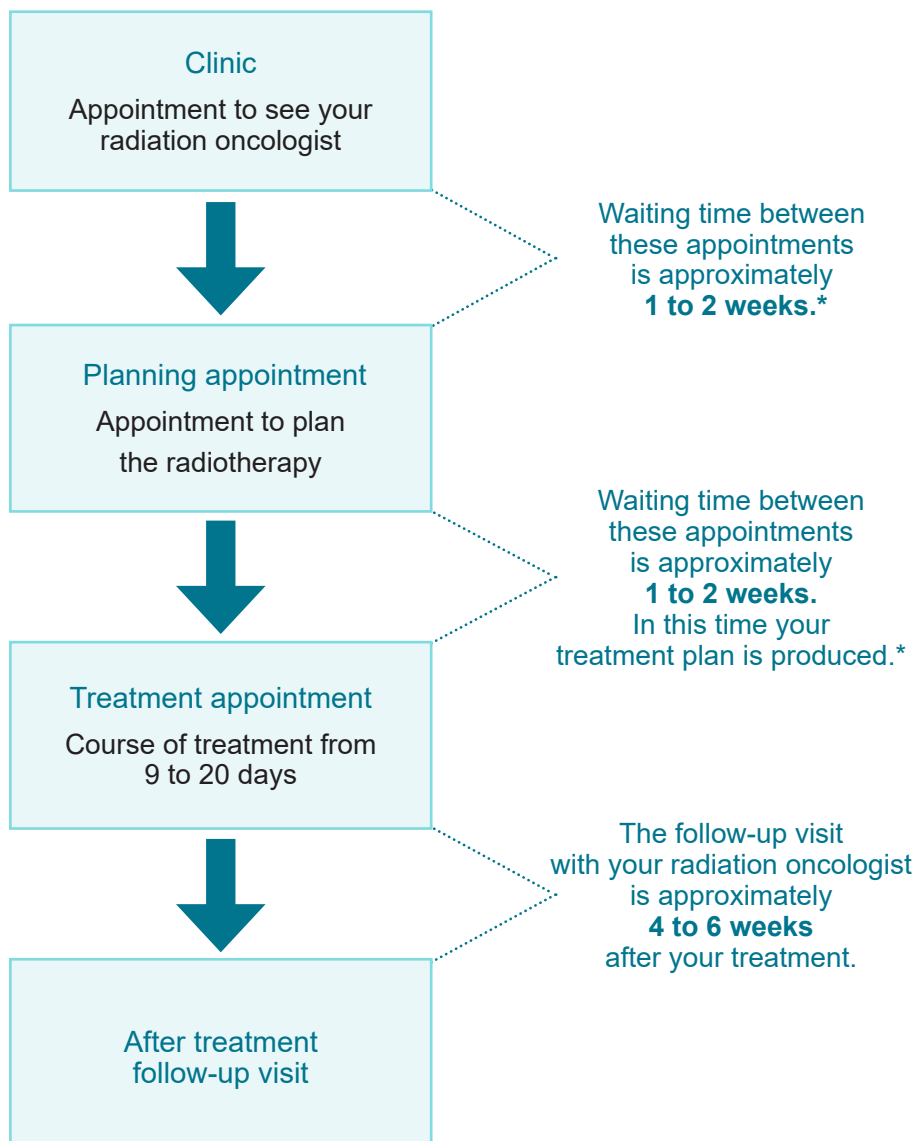
Radiation oncology medical physicist

Contact: _____

What they do:

Ensures that your treatment is delivered accurately and safely. You may see them at your planning appointment.

**The time could vary if you have other treatments to be coordinated.*



What is orthovoltage radiotherapy?



Orthovoltage radiotherapy uses x-ray beams to kill cancer cells. Orthovoltage is also known as superficial radiotherapy.

An **orthovoltage machine** is a machine that delivers low energy radiation. It only gives radiation to the specific area that is being treated.

Your **radiation oncologist** will decide how much radiation you will receive and how many times you will receive it.

When deciding this, they will take into account:

- Your age
- Your overall health, including any other medical conditions you may have
- Details about your specific cancer. Obtained from scans, surgery and/or the pathology of your cancer.

As part of your cancer treatment, radiotherapy can be given either:

- Before surgery
- After surgery
- Instead of surgery.

What side effects can the treatment cause?

Radiotherapy can cause both short- and long-term side effects. Short-term side effects occur 1 to 2 weeks into your treatment. Long-term side effects can occur months to years after your treatment has finished.

It is important that you stop smoking during radiotherapy. Smoking can increase the chance of side effects of the treatment as well as reduce the chances of being cured from your cancer.

Your side effects are dependent on the area of your body being treated. Your radiation oncologist will discuss which side effects are relevant to you.

Common short-term side effects

Skin

Radiotherapy does not 'burn' the skin. The radiation disrupts the normal skin renewal process and it may look similar to a sunburn. This may start around 7 to 10 days after the first treatment.

The skin in the treated area may become pink or red, or feel warm. It could be dry, itchy, or feel more sensitive than usual. Sometimes the skin can blister, weep and become crusty.

There may be some discomfort and swelling. These changes will continue for the week after treatment. After treatment has finished, the skin should heal over the next 2 to 3 weeks.

Hair loss

You will lose hair in the treated area only. This hair loss is usually permanent.

Fatigue / tiredness

The amount of tiredness varies for each person. It usually builds up over the course of the treatment. It is usually very mild when only small areas are being treated.

Many people are still able to continue working and carry out their usual activities during radiotherapy.

Common long-term side effects

Skin

After treatment, the skin may be more pale in colour for 6 to 12 months. It is possible that a few small blood vessels will appear on the surface.

The treated area will also be more sensitive to sunlight and burn easily. Once it is healed, use good quality sunscreen on the area.



Radiotherapy planning appointment

On this day we will make equipment, mark the area and take measurements to plan your treatment..

Please allow 30 minutes for this appointment.

This appointment starts the planning process of your radiation treatment.

At the planning appointment, we will give you information. This will be on the radiotherapy process and side effects. It is important to understand what is going to happen.

You will also be given a survey to complete that will take 5 to 10 minutes. The survey will ask you questions about your health and wellbeing.

You will also be given a start date and time for your treatment.

Identity check

Before we can start, you will be asked to tell us:

- Your name
- Your date of birth
- What area on your body will be treated with radiotherapy.

This is a NSW Health requirement and helps us to identify you. It confirms we are treating the right person and part of your body.

We will ask you this every day when you attend your radiotherapy treatment.

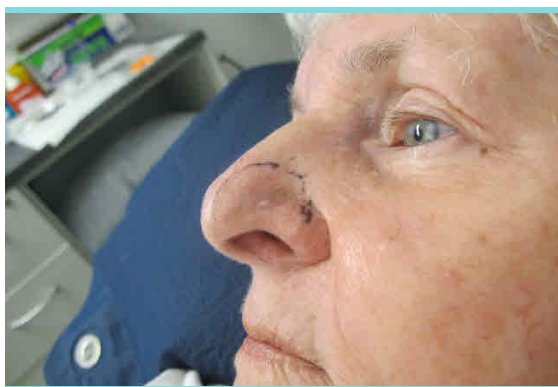
During the planning appointment

There are 3 steps to the planning appointment:

1. Marking the treatment area
2. Make a tracing of the treatment area, and take photos
3. Tattoos (if required).

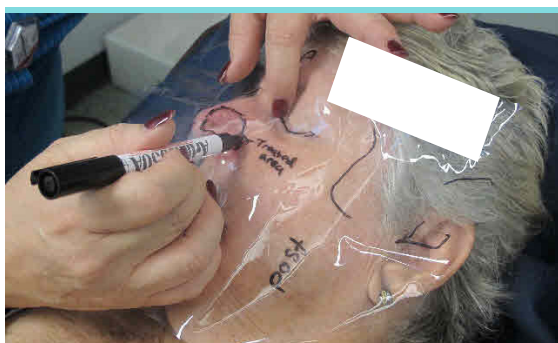
1. Marking the treatment area

Your radiation oncologist will draw the treatment area on your skin with a marker.



2. Tracing of the treatment area and photos

A tracing will be made and photos taken of the treatment area. This trace is used to locate the treatment area for every visit.

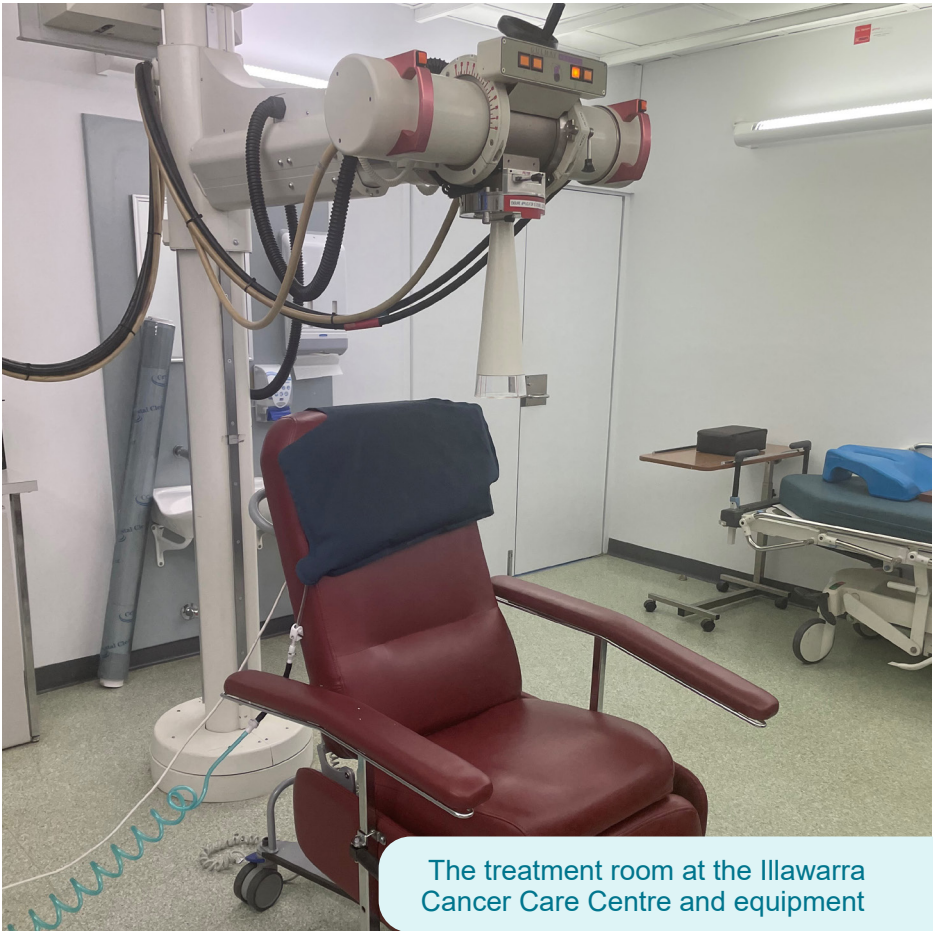




3. Tattoos

For some patients, a small permanent tattoo might be given at the end of the planning markup appointment. The tattoo is required to ensure the same area is treated daily and is marked onto the tracing.

What you will see in the room:



Radiotherapy treatment planning

Your radiation team will create a plan for you between your planning appointment and the start of your treatment.

The markings made at your planning appointment are used to create the plan. It is designed specifically for you.

Many checks are required to make sure we deliver the most appropriate treatment.



Radiotherapy team

Radiotherapy treatment

Treatment times

Treatment may be given 3 to 5 times a week, from Monday to Friday.

A list of appointment times will be given to you every week. **Please check these because your appointment times may change.**

If you need to change an appointment time, please tell the radiation therapists as soon as possible so we can arrange a better time.

It may not be possible to change your appointment times because there are many other patients also receiving treatment.

If you are running late or unable to make it to your appointment, please notify the radiation therapists machine as soon as possible.

Arriving for your treatment appointments

On your first day please arrive 5 minutes early. At the Illawarra, let the main reception desk know you have arrived. At Shoalhaven, let staff know at the radiotherapy desk you have arrived. Please take a seat in the waiting room.

A radiation therapist will meet you in the waiting area when it is time to treat you. The radiation therapist will explain what will happen. They will answer any questions you may have.

Your first treatment is usually longer than your other appointments as we need to check measurements from your planning appointment.

Please allow 30 minutes on your first day. This will allow us to give you all the information you need and deliver your treatment.

For your remaining treatments, please check in at the reception desk.

How long will my treatment take?

The time needed to deliver your treatment can be between 10 to 15 minutes.

The time in the treatment room includes:

- Getting you into the correct position
- Drawing the marks on your skin
- Positioning any equipment needed for your treatment
- Delivering your treatment
- Removing the marks from your skin
- Helping you in and out of the room.

In the treatment room

Before we can give you your treatment, you will be asked to tell us:

- Your name
- Your date of birth
- What area on your body will be treated with radiotherapy

During your treatment you are able to listen to music. We can make a playlist for you, or you can bring in your own music.

For most people, you will be positioned on a chair with a beanbag. A “bean bag” will be shaped around the part of your body being treated to help keep you still. If needed, treatment can be delivered on hospital bed.

The chair or bed may be in a slightly different position each day, but the same area will be treated.

The treating radiation therapists will draw the treatment area from the tracing made during the planning appointment. The photos taken during planning will also be used to check the position of the treatment.



Drawing the treatment area

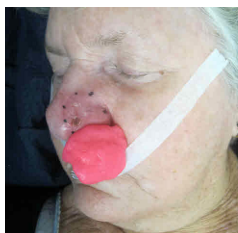
The equipment needed for your treatment is specific to the treatment area being treated. Your treating radiation therapist will explain this to you.

Some examples of equipment include:

- Nasal shields: this is a lead shield to protect the inside of your nose
- Mouth shield: this is a lead shield to protect the inside of your mouth
- Lead cutout: this is used to shape the radiation field
- Pink playdough material: when we need the radiation dose very close to your skin, we will use a playdough-like material (this is called bolus) in the treatment area.



Nasal shield



Pink stuff



Lead cutout

In the treatment room continued.

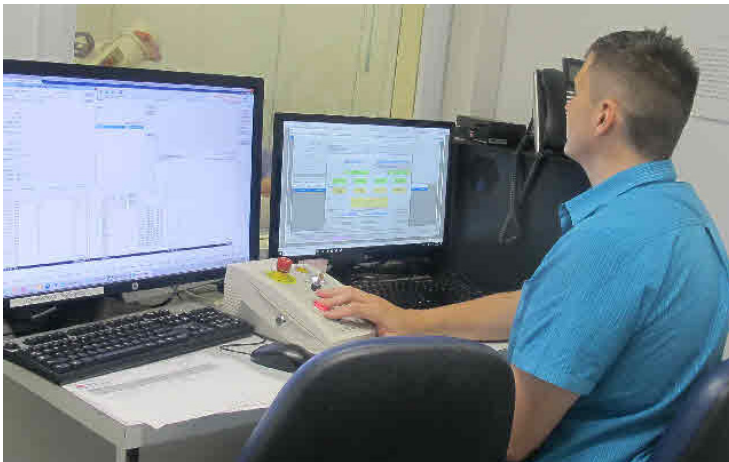
- When all equipment is in place, the treatment machine will be placed over the area to be treated
- The machine will rest on your skin with light pressure
- It should not feel uncomfortable
- The radiation therapists will leave the room to start treatment
- We can see and hear you during treatment.



Patient in position ready for the treatment to be delivered

When the radiation therapists leave the treatment room

- You will be in the room by yourself for 5 to 10 minutes
- It is important to keep still during the treatment, breathing normally.
- You can alert us at any time by talking or raising your hand.
- You will not see or feel anything during the treatment, however you will hear a noise when the machine turns on.



Staff outside the treatment room checking your position

During your course of radiation treatment

All instructions given to you by the radiation staff need to be followed for every treatment.

Tell the radiation staff as soon as possible if you are not able to follow these instructions.

Our radiation team will check on your well-being and side effects daily.

You do not become radioactive; it is safe to be around other people including pregnant women and children.

You can continue with your usual daily activities as normal.

You will not feel any effects from the treatment directly after the appointment.

Please tell the radiotherapy team about side-effects or any other problems that you may be having. It is important that we know this information.



Managing side effects during treatment

Side effects generally do not start until 1 to 2 weeks into your treatment. Please let staff know if you notice any changes in the treatment area.

Fatigue/Tiredness

To help manage your tiredness during your treatment:

- Try some light exercise when you are feeling least tired during the day
- Listen to music/read books
- Meditate or use relaxation exercises
- Spread out and prioritise what you need to get done over the day
- Ask others for help.

Skin

Changes to the skin usually start about 1 to 2 weeks after treatment has started.

There is no need to apply creams or lotions before your treatment starts. You will be given moisturising cream to apply daily to the treatment area.

Please let your treatment staff know if you notice any changes in the treatment area. If you are having treatment near your nose or mouth and notice changes inside nose or mouth area, inform staff.

- Apply after your treatment and at bed time.
- Do not apply any cream within 2 hours before your next treatment.

You will also need to follow the general skin care advice on the next page during your radiation treatment.

General skin care during your treatment



Use a mild soap such as Dove Sensitive Skin Unscented®, Aveeno Moisturising Bar®, Goat Milk or other unscented soap



Wear a hat outdoors if you are having treatment to your face



Use warm, rather than hot water if cleaning the treatment area



Gently pat dry the treatment area with a clean towel



Do not apply soap directly to the treatment area, and make sure you rinse well



Do not apply any make-up, oils, perfumes, lotions, sunscreen or talcum powders to the treatment area.



Do not shave with a razor blade in the treatment area. You can use an electric razor.



After radiotherapy

On your last day of treatment a follow-up appointment will be booked with your radiation oncologist in 4 to 6 weeks.

Any side effects that you have had during your treatment will start to improve around 2 weeks after your treatment has finished.

Last treatment

On completing your last treatment we will:

- Ensure you have sorbelene moisturiser or other cream you may have been given for itchy skin in the treatment area
- Ensure you have enough supplies of any dressing used
- Tell you who to contact if you have any skin or other treatment related problems
- Ask you to make a follow up appointment to see your radiation oncologist in 4 to 6 weeks times.

Skin care

For the next 2 weeks you need to look after your skin as you have been during your treatment.

Your skin changes can be worse a week or two after treatment is finished, your skin usually starts to improve after this time.

If the area is only dry, red or itchy, continue to apply moisturiser several times a day till healed.

If your skin is broken and there are moist areas, your radiotherapy team will advise you on how to look after the affected skin.

Any redness of the skin has usually improved 4 to 6 weeks after finishing your radiotherapy.

Fatigue

The tiredness you may have felt during treatment will improve after a few more weeks.

Long term skin care

Always protect the treated skin from the sun and heat.

Use sunscreen (on exposed skin) and cover up.

This area will always be more sensitive and at risk of sun damage even after treatment.

Follow-up care appointments

About 4 to 6 weeks after you have finished your treatment, your skin should be healed. You should also have more energy.

Your first follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist will be during this time. This appointment will have been booked on your last day of treatment.

When you attend your first follow-up appointment your radiation oncologist will:

- Review your skin
- See how you are going with any side effects you may have had during your radiotherapy treatment
- Answer any questions or concerns you may have.

After this appointment you will need to attend regular follow up reviews. These appointments will be every few months for several years.

Frequently asked questions



Will radiation therapy be painful?

While treatment is being delivered, you will not see or feel anything. The delivery of radiation is like having an X-ray or CT scan. You will hear the machine making a buzzing sound.

Will I be 'radioactive'?

No, receiving radiotherapy will not leave you radioactive at any time. It is safe to be with family, children, friends and pregnant women.

Should I take medications and/or vitamins while receiving treatment?

It is important to tell your radiation oncologist all the medicines, supplements and vitamins you are currently taking. Continue to take your prescribed medicines as normal. Some vitamins or supplements could impact on the treatment.

Will I lose my hair?

Radiotherapy only effects the area being treated. If there is hair in the treatment area, it may fall out.

Can I have a flu or tetanus vaccination?

Yes, it is safe to receive these while you are having your treatment.

Where can I park during treatment?

Free parking is available while you are having your treatment. Staff will provide more information and an access code.

Illawarra Cancer Care Centre - you can park in front of the centre, using New Dapto Road.

Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre - you can park at the rear of the centre.



Is there transport available?

There are public transport options available. You would have received this information before your consultation with the radiation oncologist.

There is community transport for those people that have difficulty. There may be a small fee. Please ask staff for more information.

How long will treatment take?

The length (or course) of radiation is based on the specific plan designed for you by your doctor. Generally, you will be in and out of the centre within 30 minutes. Delays may occur on some days.

How much does my treatment cost?

Medicare covers all costs.

Is it a problem if I miss a scheduled treatment?

Radiation treatment is designed to be delivered as small daily treatments to get the best outcome. Once treatment has started it is important that the rest are not delayed or missed. Sometimes medical reasons can cause a treatment to be delayed or missed. Your radiation oncologist will discuss this with you.

Can I get the treatment area wet or go swimming during treatment?

Showering / swimming in salt water is fine. Swimming in chlorinated pools is not recommended. Pat the skin dry, do not rub it.

What if I need accommodation whilst having treatment?

We have onsite accommodation available at both centres, please ask staff for more information.

Resources



Online resources for additional information

Cancer Council – www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy.html

eviQ Cancer Treatments Online -
www.eviq.org.au/eviQNavigationPatientsandCarers.aspx

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Cancer and Haematology Network (ISCaHN)-
http://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/Cancer_Services/

QUITLINE 137848 www.quitnow.au

Targeting Cancer – www.targetingcancer.com.au

Cancer Council information

Cancer Council information centers are located on Level 2 at the Illawarra Cancer Care Centre and the main foyer at the Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre

There is a range of information and volunteers available to assist at both centres.

If you would like to provide feedback on this booklet,
please email it to

ISLHD-ISCAHN@health.nsw.gov.au

**The printing of these books has been
kindly funded by donations to the Illawarra
Shoalhaven Cancer & Haematology Network.**



**This information
has been tested
with Consumers**

Published: June 2022

Reference: DT22/59012