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INVESTING IN VICTORIAN INNOVATION TO TACKLE BREAST INJURY IN SPORT

Breakthrough Victoria is investing in a Victorian company empowering women and girls to play contact sport with confidence and at their full potential with its innovative Zena Impact protection vest.

Breakthrough Victoria will invest \$148,000 in Zena Sport. The Geelong-based startup has developed the most advanced breast and rib impact protection vests for female athletes in contact sports such as AFL, rugby, basketball and soccer.

The Zena Z1 Vest is made from a liquid polyurethane foam that is injected directly into moulds then heat sealed onto the fabric to create a single, seamless barrier between the ball, elbow or ground and the breast tissue or ribs.

Tested by Deakin University and AFLW players, the vest absorbs the initial impact and distributes the energy over a larger area to significantly reduce the risk of injury. According to the latest [research](#) almost 60 per cent of female athletes have experienced a previous breast injury, and 90 per cent of them never reported these injuries to anyone.

Despite this high rate of injury, [Australian research](#) shows half of the coaches and medical professionals surveyed were not aware that breast injuries were a problem for female contact football players – a lack of awareness Zena Sport aims to change through research and education.

Breakthrough Victoria's investment is a Pre-Seed investment as part of Zena Sport's first external fundraising round. Other investors include Carbine, Smorgon Family and Euphemia. The funds raised will allow the company to expand its marketing and business development, creating up to 12 local jobs within two years.

Zena Sport was founded by husband-and-wife team Donna and Brad Johnson in 2018. Donna drives the company as CEO, while former Western Bulldogs captain Brad brings his 25 years' experience in the Australian Football League to lead operations.

Quotes attributable to Breakthrough Victoria CEO Grant Dooley

"Zena Sport saw a gap in the market and seized the opportunity to develop the world's only scientifically tested chest protection vest for women and girls in contact sports."

"We believe Zena Sport has great potential for growth. Donna and Brad know their market and are passionate about encouraging more women and girls to play contact sports at their full potential. Their entrepreneurship, innovation and the positive impact of their product are exactly what we look for in our investments."

Quotes attributable to Zena Sport CEO and founder Donna Johnson

"We are incredibly grateful to Breakthrough Victoria for not only their investment in Zena Sport but also their belief in our innovative product and the value they see in supporting women and girls in sport."

About Breakthrough Victoria

Breakthrough Victoria is an independent investment company established in 2021 to manage the Victorian Government's \$2 billion Breakthrough Victoria Fund. We invest in innovation for impact, supporting companies to commercialise breakthrough innovation that will improve people's lives and benefit Victoria.

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“This investment gives us the opportunity to scale and grow our brand globally. Our Mission is to assist a new generation of females to perform beyond what they thought was possible and this investment will do exactly that.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Industry and Innovation Ben Carroll

“Investing into Zena Sport is another way that we are backing bold ideas that improve the lives of people – in this case women and girls who play contact sport – boosting our economy, while creating jobs.”

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