

Please save my grandma

Have a heart, Canberra

MARY PAPADAKIS

A LITTLE girl has made an emotional appeal for help to save her cancer-stricken grandmother's life.

Supported by her close-knit family, preschooler Anika McKenzie, 4, has written a letter to federal Health Minister Tony Abbott asking the Government to subsidise the breast cancer drug Herceptin.

Anika's grandmother, Maree Bissels, 46, who she affectionately calls Eema, was diagnosed with aggressive HER-2 positive breast cancer in June.

Ms Bissels is an ideal candidate for the drug, which is designed to block the HER-2 protein and cut the risk of the cancer returning by 46 per cent.

As pressure mounts to list the \$70,000 drug on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Anika this week put pen to paper in a simple appeal to Mr Abbott: "Help my Eema."

The preschooler wants nothing more than to see her grandma healthy.

The illness has robbed them of special moments together, such as collecting eggs on the family farm.

Ms Bissels' devoted sister Lynda Sharp, 44, also has vowed to do everything in her power to save her — which means obtaining the drug by early next year at the latest.

"When she first got diagnosed I said 'I'm going to save you, Maree'," Ms Sharp said. "I will. I can't live if she's not on this planet."

Ms Bissels, who is supported by family and friends, including her elderly parents Doris and Bill Sharp, her partner Mick Humphreys and her children David, Katrina and Jacinta, has had surgery. She is now having chemotherapy and is selflessly testing a new hormonal treatment, Triptorelin, which may help future cancer patients. She will also need radiotherapy.

Ms Bissels said she struggled to understand how a price tag could be placed on the drug.

"The oncologist told me it's made for my type of cancer," she said from her Wesburn home in Victoria's outer east.

"It's sitting there on the shelf somewhere, but it's like, you can't touch it unless you've got \$70,000.

"It's not so much anger, it's disbelief that this could be happening to me and so many other women.

"There are women who needed it yesterday. I've got daughters



Brave battle: Maree Bissels and granddaughter Anika McKenzie, 4, love collecting eggs from their chickens. Picture: ROB LEESON

MOTHER'S PLEA TO KYLIE FOR HELP



Essie Dempster

A MOTHER of three with aggressive breast cancer has begged Kylie Minogue to join the Herceptin debate.

Essie Dempster, 49, has written to the entertainer pleading with her to put pressure on the Federal Government to fund the life-saving drug through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Mrs Dempster said it was even possible Minogue may be HER-2 positive and using the drug herself.

Minogue is expected to return to Melbourne

early next year for further treatment.

Mrs Dempster, a high school teacher, said she had been forced to borrow money against her family home to pay for her Herceptin treatment.

"I had no choice," Mrs Dempster said. "It costs \$1080 a week and that's the only way we could pay for it.

Mrs Dempster, who was diagnosed with HER-2 positive breast cancer, started Herceptin last month.

ROBYN RILEY

and a granddaughter, the picture is bigger than me."

About 11,500 Australian women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

Ms Sharp appealed to Mr Abbott to fast-track Herceptin's PBS listing

for the treatment of early stage breast cancer.

"I understand that everything has a process, but we're running out of time for Maree. It has to happen now," she said. "It's a very aggressive cancer."

Ms Bissels and Ms

Sharp called on Australians to write letters of support to Mr Abbott and their local MPs.

"It would be the best Christmas and New Year's present to all these women," Ms Sharp said.

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Thunder is not clapped

A SHOW by Australia's Thunder from Down Under male dancers has been cancelled in Jamestown, US, after protests from religious leaders and politicians.

Jamestown councillors voted last night to terminate the con-

tract with the group after receiving protests from local pastors that the review was a strip show. A spokeswoman for the all male show — described by promoters as a "sensual journey" — called the vote a shocking form of censorship.

Penny Levin said the live show was "tasteful adult entertainment". "No-one is being forced to buy a ticket or see the show, but now people are being forced to not see the show," she said.

AP



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