

**MEDIA RELEASE****Strictly Embargoed 00:01am 28 September 2020**

## **Australians urged to put cancer screening at the top of their to-do list**

Cancer Council and the Australian Government are partnering to encourage eligible Australians to prioritise their health and participate in the national bowel, cervical and breast screening programs amidst growing concerns over undiagnosed cancers.

The national campaign *Cancer Screening Saves Lives* launched today to help combat the impact of COVID-19 on the number of Australians participating in national cancer screening programs and visiting their GPs for regular health checks.

The campaign is funded as a \$2.2 million Commonwealth Government initiative.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO of Cancer Council Australia said the need for the campaign was clear.

“Since COVID-19 began, we’ve heard many stories of declines in GP visits, hospital admissions and cancer diagnoses. Data released earlier this month backed those anecdotes, highlighting a decline of diagnostic procedures for cancer during the first COVID-19 lockdown.

“A report by Cancer Australia showed procedures for breast imaging decreased by 37% in March and April. Colorectal investigations were around half (between 55% and 57%) of those in March.

“These figures point to fewer people following up on potential cancer cases and while numbers have improved since then, they are still lower than we would like to see.”

Professor Aranda explained screening programs are designed to detect early signs, before symptoms appear and for cervical and bowel screening, even before a cancer occurs.

“We understand COVID-19 has impacted Australians in lots of different ways. Some people have deprioritised their general health check-ups during a time that has been very stressful and required lots of change. We are urging those people to put cancer screening back on their to-do list.

“We know some people need reassurance that attending appointments is safe and does not place a burden on health care professionals at this difficult time. Screening providers are back open, with measures in place to protect clients and staff. Further, participation in cancer screening helps save lives and reduces the load on the health care system into the future.

“If you have received an invitation to participate in any of the three screening programs, please do not delay because of COVID-19. Screening can either prevent cancer, or, if cancer is found in its early stages, screening can lead to early detection and more effective treatment.”

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program sends free bowel screening kits to Australians aged 50-74 every two years. The kits are completed at home and returned via post.

Cervical screening is recommended for people with a cervix aged between 25-74, who have ever been sexually active. In 2017, the National Cervical Screening Program transitioned to



the new cervical screening test, which can detect the presence of the human papillomavirus (HPV) before abnormalities develop.

Patients who have a negative HPV test result now only need to be screened every five years. Self-collection of a vaginal sample is also available for women aged 30 years of age or older, who are either more than two years overdue for screening or have never screened. Self-collection is still accessed through a healthcare provider in general practice and is a safe and effective option for eligible women.

BreastScreen Australia invites women aged 50-74 to screening mammography every two years. Women aged 40-49 and 74 years and over are also eligible for free screening.

The integrated campaign includes radio, digital and social media advertising will run from today throughout spring. Tailored materials for GPs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and for Greek, Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese speaking communities are also being developed.

For more information about the campaign visit: [www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)

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