

**MEDIA RELEASE****Monday 4 March 2019****Cancer Council aims to combat nation's second biggest cancer killer***Australia's first major national campaign promoting bowel cancer screening launches*

With only four in 10 eligible Australians participating in Australia's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, Cancer Council has launched an urgent call for more Australians to complete the free life-saving test.

The new national campaign funded by a \$10 million Federal Government grant launching today will be the biggest campaign ever run in Australia to promote bowel cancer screening. It will include two TV advertisements, one which has already proven its lifesaving potential in Victoria.

New research shows that a 2017 Cancer Council Victoria campaign delivered over seven-weeks resulted in approximately 12,500 extra Victorians screening for bowel cancer during the campaign period, potentially saving more than 300 people from developing bowel cancer and more than 180 from dying of bowel cancer.

Anita Dessaix, Chair, Public Health Committee, Cancer Council Australia said that Australia's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program promised to be one of the most important cancer control initiatives in Australian history – but more Australians needed to take part.

“Bowel cancer is Australia's second biggest cancer killer. Many people don't realise it kills more Australians each year than breast, prostate or skin cancer. When you receive the test don't put it in the cupboard and forget about it - delaying can easily become ignoring, forgetting and ultimately not doing.”

“The test is quick, simple and you can complete it in the comfort of your own home. We know that after doing the test, 77 per cent of people go on to repeat the test when next invited.”

The bowel cancer screening test detects blood in poo, which can be a sign of pre-cancerous lesions and cancers in the early stages and often these don't have any symptoms. 90 per cent of bowel cancer cases can be successfully treated if caught in the early stages.

The mass media campaign, which includes TV, radio, digital and social media advertising, will run over three separate seven-week bursts in 2019, with further communications support from Cancer Council, including outreach to GPs to encourage them to get their patients to do the test.

Tailored materials for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians will also be incorporated and advertisements are also being developed in Greek, Arabic, Italian, Cantonese and Mandarin.

The Australian Government commenced a phased-in roll-out of Australia's free screening program in 2006, with the final two age groups (52 and 56-year olds) added to the program for the first time this year. This means in 2019, people aged 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 74 will be sent the free test in the mail.

From next year, free bowel screening kits will be sent on a two-yearly basis to all eligible Australians aged 50 to 74.

For more information about the bowel screening campaign visit [bowelcancer.org.au](http://bowelcancer.org.au).

ENDS

For media enquiries or interviews, please contact Tegan Brown via the Cancer Council Australia media hotline (02) 8063 4109 (your call will be diverted to mobile outside hours) or email [media@cancer.org.au](mailto:media@cancer.org.au)

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About the new research**

Cancer Council NSW was commissioned in 2018 to model the results of a seven-week bowel cancer campaign run in Victoria in 2017. Approximately 12,500 extra Victorians screened for bowel cancer during the campaign period, potentially saving more than 300 people from developing bowel cancer and more than 180 from dying of bowel cancer.

### **About the campaign**

This campaign, which will be run by Cancer Council Australia, was funded through a \$10 million Federal Government grant. It will air nationally this year and will include television commercials, radio, out of home advertising, targeted digital advertisements and a communications campaign. Communications will also be targeted to General Practitioners to encourage them to speak to their patients about the importance of the screening test

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Guidelines recommend Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) screening every two years, starting at age 50 and continuing to age 74, for people who are at average risk, or slightly above, for bowel cancer (about 95-98% of the population). Individuals at higher risk are encouraged to speak with their doctor.

### **Key Information**

- Cancer Council NSW research indicates that at current participation rates, the NBCSP is projected to prevent more than 92,200 cases of cancer and 59,000 deaths from 2015 to 2040. If participation increased to 50%, an additional 24,300 cases and 16,800 deaths could be prevented. This rises to 37,300 cases and 24,800 deaths prevented at 60% participation. The total mortality benefit, from a sustained participation rate of 60% from 2020, is estimated at 83,800 Australian lives saved by 2040.
- Screening for bowel cancer involves a simple, at-home test called a faecal occult blood test (FOBT). This test looks for traces of blood in the poo which are invisible and could be a sign of bowel cancer.
- Australians aged between 50 and 74 years, will get a free at home test in the mail from the Australian Government. This test will be sent to the address on your Medicare card within the first six months of your 50th birthday and every two years thereafter. People living in hotter areas of Australia will receive their invitation during the cooler months of the year.
- Bowel cancer is one of Australia's most common cancers, especially for people aged over 50. In Australia, the lifetime risk of developing bowel cancer before the age of 75 is around one in 19 for men and one in 28 for women. Bowel cancer is one of Australia's most common cancers, especially for people aged over 50. In Australia, the lifetime risk of developing bowel cancer before the age of 75 is around one in 22 for men and one in 30 for women. More than 100 Australians die each week from bowel cancer, but if found early, 90% of cases could be treated successfully.