

**MEDIA RELEASE**

Monday 3 June 2019

**Cancer Council asks, “5.5 million poo tests. Have you had yours?”**

*50-54 year olds neglecting to participate in National Bowel Cancer Screening Program*

Cancer Council has launched a renewed call for all Australians aged 50-74 to complete their free bowel screening test, following new data released today showing that still few Australians are taking part in the program – particularly in the youngest eligible cohort.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s National Bowel Cancer Screening Program Monitoring Report shows that 5.5 million bowel cancer screening tests have been completed since the program roll out first began in 2006 – but those aged 50 – 54 have the lowest participation rates, with just 30% returning their test in 2016–2017.

Men were less likely to take the test, with just 28% in the 50-54 age bracket returning their screening test when it was sent to them in the mail.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO Cancer Council Australia said, “Turning 50 can be a landmark year and we want to remind this group that your risk of bowel cancer increases with age, so it is important to get tested even if you feel healthy and have no symptoms.

“It’s alarming to see only 3 in 10 people aged 50-54 are returning the free screening test when it is sent to them in the mail.”

Professor Aranda said that encouragingly those who had done the test in the past appeared to be willing to repeat the process in the future – helping to dispel the myth that the test is unpleasant.

“Of those who had completed the test before – 78% completed the test when they received it the next time around. Once you have done the test once – you realise how simple it is.

“The latest data is a reminder that doing a bowel cancer screening test shouldn’t be seen as an unusual thing to do. We need to normalise the bowel screening test and make sure everyone understands the test is quick, hygienic and you can complete it in the comfort of your own home.”

The report also notes that bowel cancers in Australia diagnosed at stage 1 have a survival rate of 99%. By contrast, stage 4 bowel cancer (the most advanced) have a survival rate of 13%.

“The latest data on bowel cancer by stage further cements the importance of participating in the screening program to help find cancer early. The test could quite literally save your life,” Professor Aranda explained.

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.

Figures from the report show Australians aged 50-74 remain the group most likely to be diagnosed with bowel cancer.

Cancer Council is running a Federal Government funded, national advertising campaign with the aim of lifting screening rates.

Currently four in 10 Australians complete their bowel screening test, yet Cancer Council

research has shown if screening rates increased to six in 10, nearly 84,000 lives could be saved by 2040.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program has been gradually phased in and from next year will send free bowel kits every two years to all eligible people aged 50-74. In 2019, Australians aged 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 74 will be sent the test. The test is sent to the address listed on the individual's Medicare card.

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