

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**18 January 2019**

### **Cancer Council welcomes \$10 million Government investment in bowel cancer**

*New campaign to encourage more Australians to do the simple test that could save 84,000 lives*

Cancer Council Australia has welcomed an unprecedented investment by the Federal Government to help tackle Australia's second biggest cancer killer – bowel cancer.

Cancer Council Australia will receive \$10 million from Government to fund a national mass media campaign to encourage more Australians to screen for bowel cancer with a simple home test that could save their life.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO, Cancer Council Australia welcomed the news from the Minister for Health, Greg Hunt and said that a national bowel cancer campaign was one of the most important things the Australian Government could do to prevent cancer deaths in Australia.

“It is estimated that over 17,000 Australians were diagnosed with bowel cancer last year – and over 4,000 died as a result.

“Yet, currently only around 4 in 10 eligible Australians complete the home bowel cancer screening test when it arrives in the mail. Cancer Council research has shown that if this figure was increased to just 6 in 10, around 84,000 lives could be saved in the next twenty years.

“Minister Hunt should be commended for this investment, at an ideal time coinciding with full implementation of the program. This will be the first major national campaign to encourage bowel cancer screening participation – and promotes one of the most important public health programs in Australia's history.”

Professor James St John, bowel screening advisor to Cancer Council Australia, said it was vital that Australians who receive a bowel cancer screening test in the mail complete it. People experiencing symptoms or with a strong family history of bowel cancer should see their doctor.

“The challenge with bowel cancer is that it can be a silent killer often with no early warning signs, however 90 per cent of bowel cancers can be successfully treated if found early. The home screening test identifies early signs that cancer is developing and has already saved thousands of Australian lives through early detection.

“However, Australia's national bowel cancer screening program will only reach its full potential if more Australians do the test. This national campaign will help to ensure that more Australians over 50 recognise that bowel cancer screening is a life-saving opportunity not to be missed.”

Phillip Island's Judy Christie thought she was fit and healthy when she took the bowel cancer home test in 2017, so she was surprised when the test returned a positive result and with further testing was found to have bowel cancer. She's now encouraging more Australians to take part.

“The surgeon told me that eventually I would have developed symptoms, but by then they wouldn't have been able to help me. It would have been palliative care only.

“With bowel cancer there are not necessarily any symptoms. If you get sent the test, do it. That's the only way you'll find out. If you catch it nice and early, it's entirely curable.”

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

The latest funding will be used to run three separate seven-week bursts of mass media activity in 2019, with further communications support from Cancer Council, including outreach to GPs to encourage them to help encourage their patients to do the test.

**ENDS**

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