

Media Release

Thursday 8 April 2020

Over half a million life-saving tests in 3 months – Cancer Council asks, have you missed out?

Australians urged to participate in bowel, cervical and breast cancer screening

New data shows over half a million bowel and cervical screening tests were completed in the last three months of 2020. However, we know around 1 in 2 Australians who are eligible for cancer screening are still not completing their checks.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report *Cancer Screening Programs: Quarterly Data* showed in the final quarter of 2020 there were 396,000 bowel cancer screening tests returned and 143,000 Cervical Screening Tests completed as part of Australia's national cancer screening programs. While these numbers are encouraging, hundreds of thousands of Australians are missing out on vital screening.

Tanya Buchanan, CEO of Cancer Council Australia explained the importance of participating in screening programs and urged eligible Australians to participate.

"Every person who has completed bowel and cervical screening is giving themselves the best chance of a good outcome.

"Australia's screening programs are designed to detect cancer early. We know the earlier a cancer is detected and treated the better the outcome.

"While seeing nearly 400,000 bowel cancer screening tests returned in the final quarter of 2020 is encouraging, we know that only 4 in 10 (44%) Australians are returning their free test kits when it is sent to them in the mail. That means 6 in 10 Australians are missing out on doing the test.

"Bowel cancer is currently the second biggest cause of cancer death in Australia and for people aged 50 to 74 screening every 2 years is the best way to reduce your risk.

"Australia's free national bowel screening tests can detect early signs of the bowel cancer and if found early, 9 out of 10 cases can be successfully treated. Cancer Council's message is simple: if you are sent the test you should do it when it arrives," Ms Buchanan said.

The report estimates a participation rate of 46%* for cervical screening.

"Routine cervical screening is your best protection against cervical cancer and over 70% of all cervical cancers detected are in women who have never screened or are overdue," Ms Buchanan said.

"You are eligible for cervical screening if you are 25 to 74 years old and have a cervix; and have ever been sexually active. Call your doctor, nurse or healthcare worker to book a test.

"Cancer Council wants all eligible Australians to feel confident booking their cervical screening or completing their free bowel screening test when it is sent to them.

"We also urge Australians to have a conversation with their loved ones to ask them if they're up to date with their screening.

"Health checks can be something people avoid. It may be because they are busy, they don't like the test, or they don't understand the importance. What is important is that people understand that participating in cancer screening programs is a normal part of looking after



your health. Half a million tests taken in three months shows you are not alone – and we want more people to join you.”

While participating in screening is important to reducing your cancer risk, Ms Buchanan reiterated “It is important to visit your doctor if you have any symptoms that are concerning, regardless of when your last screening test was.”

Cancer Council’s information and support line is available on 13 11 20.

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For more information please contact:

Tegan Brown, Cancer Council Australia, media@cancer.org.au or call (02) 8063 4109 (our media landline diverts to our on-call mobile outside of hours).

See Cancer Council’s [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Notes to editors

* Participation rates for cervical cancer screening is an estimate of participation, due to the fact that only 2 years of data are available. Participation in the new 5-year program cannot be accurately reported until there are 5 years of data available (2018–2022). Participation rates may also look lower than rates previously reported due to a change in the definition which now only counts cervical screens where the primary reason is for screening rather than for any reason.

View the report [here](#).