

MEDIA RELEASE

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Promoting bowel cancer screening key to saving lives and driving health system efficiency

Cancer Council Australia is encouraging all eligible Australians to participate in the nation's free National Bowel Cancer Screening Program as the best way to prevent bowel cancer deaths and gain new efficiencies in colonoscopy use.

Currently around one million colonoscopies are performed in Australia each year, however it is estimated around 10 per cent are a result of the screening program.

Although the latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows that most Australians who have a positive bowel cancer screening test are not facing lengthy wait times, evidence suggests delays faced by some people are caused by inappropriate use of colonoscopy as a screening tool.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO Cancer Council Australia said the best way to reduce pressure on colonoscopy services was for doctors to use the new clinical practice guidelines, which recommend average-risk Australians aged 50 to 74 participate in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

Professor Aranda said that not only would more program participants help reach the goal of 60% participation and 84,000 lives saved by 2040, it would also enable health services to prioritise their colonoscopies to patients at highest risk.

"Only four in 10 eligible Australians currently participate in our lifesaving bowel cancer screening program.

"For people at average risk of bowel cancer, the free home bowel cancer screening test is the most effective way to detect signs of cancer early and it can be done in the comfort of your home.

"It detects blood in the stool, which can be a sign of cancerous or pre-cancerous lesions, determining whether further investigation is needed. If found early, 90 percent of bowel cancers can be successfully treated. We need to get the message out that more eligible Australians should do the test – it could save their life.

"The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is one of the biggest, most important public health programs in Australia since we introduced measures such as public sanitation and immunisation," she said.

"In this, the year when the program rollout is complete, all major stakeholders are working together to ensure it saves as many lives as possible.

"People in the community can play their part in continuing to reduce waiting times, by doing their free screening test.

"Over time, this will have a profound effect on freeing up colonoscopy capacity. Programs are already in place across the country to reduce colonoscopy waiting times and ensure patients with the highest need are seen promptly, but Australians also need to play their part."

Cancer Council recommends anyone who is concerned about the bowel cancer screening test or the time they are waiting for a colonoscopy consults their doctor.

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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