

Frequently asked questions

What is the Get Behind Bowel Screening campaign?

Get Behind Bowel Screening is a national advocacy campaign run by Cancer Council urging the Australian Government to expand the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program to include bi-annual screening for everyone over 50.

What is the aim of the campaign?

We know screening for bowel cancer saves lives and Cancer Council believes every Australian over 50 has the right to a free national bowel cancer screening program.

We're asking all Australians to send an email to their local Member of Parliament urging them to put pressure on the Australian Government to expand the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program to include two-yearly screening for everyone over 50 by 2012.

We aim to engage the community in showing Government that Australians want a firm commitment to full implementation of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program from the next budget.

Why is a free, national bowel cancer screening program so important?

Bowel cancer kills 80 Australians every week, yet nearly all cases can be cured if found early.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program provides enormous potential to prevent deaths from bowel cancer - potential that will not be fully realised without increased funding and a clear plan for program expansion. Currently, only people turning 50, 55 or 65 before December 2010 will receive a free screening kit and with no offer of re-screening. That means around five million Australians aged over 50 are missing out on a test that could save their life.

The Government has the ability to save more than 30 lives every week - that's 30 mothers, fathers, daughters or brothers - if they commit to funding two-yearly bowel screening for all Australians over 50.

How can do I support for the campaign?

You can show your support for the campaign by sending an email petitioning your local Member of Parliament to get behind bowel screening.

We've made sending the email easy – just log onto www.getbehindbowelscreening.com.au and in a few clicks you can create an email that will be automatically sent to your local Member of Parliament. There's also space to add a personal message of your own.

To generate as much support as possible we're also encouraging people to forward the website link to 11 friends and family, signifying the number of people who lose their lives to bowel cancer each day in Australia.

Other ways to support the campaign include sharing your own experience of bowel cancer, sending a letter to your local Member of Parliament and writing to your local newspaper.

Why is Cancer Council asking people to share their stories?

Bowel cancer is the second most common cause of cancer deaths in Australia, yet it just doesn't get the attention it deserves. By asking people to share their experiences of bowel cancer and screening we hope to generate interest in the campaign and inspire others to get involved.

There are thousands of Australians whose lives have been touched by bowel cancer. If you think bowel cancer screening has saved your life or the life of someone close to you, or if you feel strongly that screening should be available to everyone over 50, we'd love to hear from you. Go to getbehindbowelscreening.com.au and click on 'Who's been making a noise' to share your story.

It's the real, human stories that make our campaigns a success.

How long will the campaign run?

The campaign will be launched nationally on 6 June, ahead of Bowel Cancer Awareness Week (8-15 June). It will run until the end of October, when the campaign will be evaluated and the outcomes incorporated into Cancer Council Australia's 2010-11 pre-budget submission to Treasury. We expect the campaign to have several peaks with media activity planned around the launch, Daffodil Day and at various milestones.

How will the success of the campaign be determined?

Although it's difficult to estimate how many people will support the campaign, we really hope thousands of people will send an email to their local Member of Parliament so we can show the Government it's time bowel cancer got the attention it deserves.

What does screening involve? What is an FOBT?

Screening for bowel cancer involves an FOBT (faecal occult blood test) - a simple at-home test for the early signs of bowel cancer. It involves taking tiny samples from two or three bowel motions using a test kit. The samples are collected at home and then sent to a laboratory for testing.

FOBTs look for tiny amounts of blood in a bowel motion (blood which cannot be seen with your own eyes). Blood in a bowel motion is usually caused by something less serious than cancer, however it may be due to a polyp (a growth on the inside of the bowel that could develop into cancer) or a bowel cancer that bleeds. If blood is found in a bowel motion, further tests will be needed to find out what has caused the bleeding.

Why did the government recently recall a large number of kits distributed as part of the national program?

In May 2009 the government issued a statement recalling the 475,000 faecal occult blood tests (FOBT) distributed as part of the national program since 1 December 2008 amid concerns about the reliability of negative test results.

The government has written to all 475,000 people who received the faulty kits and they are being invited to re-take the test which they will receive as soon as new kits become available.

Get Behind Bowel Screening



What is Cancer Council's advice for anyone who received a faulty kit?

We encourage everyone who received an FOBT from the Government since 1 December 2008 to complete the replacement kit when it arrives.

If you completed a test and received a positive result you do not need to re-do the test but it is important to see your doctor for follow-up if you haven't already.

People who are concerned should consult their doctor. In most cases bowel cancer is a slow-growing disease, so the problem with the kits is not expected to cause adverse outcomes provided people who are contacted take the follow-up test.

Cancer Council is reminding people that the test is extremely important and that the temporary problem with some kits should not discourage people targeted for screening from participating.

How many people in Australia get bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is the second most common cause of cancer-related death in Australia. 80 Australians die each week from bowel cancer.

More than 13,000 Australians get bowel cancer each year. This means there is a one in 12 risk of an Australian getting bowel cancer in their lifetime (to age 85). Over 3800 Australians die from bowel cancer each year.