

7 September 2026

This Women's Health Week, Cancer Council Australia is calling on Australian women to prioritise cancer screening and healthy habits

Finding cancer early saves lives, and healthy habits can reduce cancer risk

This Women's Health Week (7–11 September), Cancer Council Australia is urging Australian women to book their next screening appointment, and to adopt health habits that can help reduce their cancer risk.

Finding cancer early, before symptoms appear, dramatically improves the chances of successful treatment. Free national screening programs exist for breast, bowel, cervical and lung cancer, and using them is one of the most powerful things a woman can do for her long-term health.

Chair of Cancer Council's Public Health Committee, Anita Dessaix, says this week serves as an important reminder for women to make the time for themselves.

"Life gets busy, which means we sometimes leave important things like our health at the bottom of the priority list. No matter what stage of life you're at, there are empowering and everyday choices you can make to help reduce your cancer risk and look after yourself," said Ms Dessaix.

"We know that limiting alcohol use, not smoking, being sun safe, staying physically active, maintaining a healthy weight and eating well, are all important factors that can meaningfully reduce cancer risk. When it comes to diet, start with simple changes such as swapping in wholegrains, doubling the amount of vegetables in cooking, and choosing fruits as snacks. Get active with any movement you enjoy whether that's walking, running, dance or strength-training, and slowly build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a day.

"Looking after your skin by using sun protection is another way you can lower your cancer risk and it's never too late to start. We recommend making sun protection a part of your daily routine such as leaving a hat in the car and popping on a long-sleeve shirt and sunglasses before you go outdoors to reduce the risk of skin cancer.



"Staying on top of cancer screening could save your life as some cancers can develop without symptoms. Don't wait for something to feel wrong. Book the mammogram. Do the bowel test. Make the appointment. These are small actions that can make an enormous difference."

There are four cancer screening programs available to women in Australia:

- BreastScreen Australia invites women aged 50–74 for a free mammogram every two years. Women aged 40 to 49 can also book in a free screen. Since the program began, it has performed more than 26.7 million mammograms and detected over 137,000 invasive breast cancers.
- The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program invites Australians aged 45 – 74 to screen for bowel cancer every two years. Australians aged 50 – 74 are automatically sent a free at-home test kit in the mail every two years, while those aged 45 – 49 can request their first free kit online at ncsr.gov.au/bowel-test or by calling 1800 627 701. A new YouGov poll reveals that while nine in ten Australians (92%) agree bowel cancer screening is important, fewer than half (42%) of eligible Australians have completed the free at-home test (AIHW 2025). Additionally, the YouGov poll shows one in four (26%) Australian women believe bowel cancer typically occurs with obvious signs or symptoms, when in reality, it often presents with none at all.
- The National Cervical Screening Program invites women and people with a cervix aged 25–74 every five years and they can now choose to do the test themselves with a simple swab. Australia is already on track to become the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer, a milestone driven in large part by this program.
- The National Lung Cancer Screening Program offers a free low-dose CT scan for those aged 50 to 70 with a significant history of smoking tobacco cigarettes. More than six in ten lung cancer cases can be successfully treated when found early.

"While we have a successful national screening program for cervical cancer, there is more work to be done to help improve early detection of other gynaecological cancers. We welcome further research and progress in this space so we can improve outcomes for those impacted by gynaecological cancers," concludes Ms Dessaix.



It is also important for women of all ages to get to know their own body and know what is normal for them. Any new or unusual changes such as a lump, a spot on the skin, unexplained bleeding or changes in bowel habits should be checked by a doctor promptly.

Cancer Council recommends the following lifestyle changes to reduce cancer risk:

- Quit smoking and if you don't smoke, don't start. For support to quit smoking or vaping, visit quit.org.au or call Quitline 13 7848.
- Whenever the UV Index is 3 or above, we encourage women to Slip on sun-protective clothing, Slop on SPF50 or SPF50+ broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen, Slap on a broad-brimmed hat, Seek shade and Slide on sunglasses.
- Following the Australian Dietary Guidelines: aim for two serves of fruit, five serves of vegetables, including legumes/beans, and plenty of cereals, preferably wholegrain. Limit red meat and avoid processed meats and foods that are high in saturated fat, added sugar and salt. There are resources and healthy recipes developed by dietitians [here](#).
- Following Australia's 24-hour movement guidelines: at least 30 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days, and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week.
- Reducing your alcohol use. Alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen and can cause at least seven types of cancer. If you choose to drink, it's recommended you follow the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines and limit your intake to no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any drinking occasion.

-ENDS-

About the poll

This poll was conducted by independent market research firm YouGov between 2nd and 9th April 2025. The poll was carried out online, and the sample comprised of 1,596 Australian citizens aged 18 years and older. The data has been weighted and is representative of all Australian voters 18+ by age, gender, location, education, income and past Federal election vote.

Contact details





Media Release

For all media enquiries and interview opportunities, please contact:

Cancer Council Australia, media@cancer.org.au

02 8256 4109 (redirects to mobile outside of business hours)

About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

Find out more at cancer.org.au, or visit our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [LinkedIn](#)

