

**Media Release**

Strictly embargoed: 00:01 Thursday 8 October 2020

**NEW DATA SHOWS LIFE SAVING CANCER SCREENING PARTICIPATION AT RISK DURING COVID**

Cancer Council has issued a call for Australians to act now to get up to date with their bowel, breast and cervical screening following data released today that shows fewer Australians are screening in 2020 than previous years.

The report, *Cancer Screening and COVID-19 in Australia*, released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, has shown that between January to June 2020 there was 144,982 fewer mammograms and 443,935 fewer cervical screening tests have been completed, and from January to July 144,379 fewer bowel screening tests returned, compared with previous years.\*

Minister for Health, Greg Hunt said, “The Australian Government anticipated a drop in screening in the first half of 2020, and invested in a \$2.2 million *Cancer Screening Saves Lives* campaign, delivered by Cancer Council, to combat this drop and encourage more people to screen. It is simple: cancer screening saves lives. I urge all eligible Australians to make sure they get screened”.

Megan Varlow, Acting CEO of Cancer Council Australia, explained some of the possible reasons for the decline.

“COVID-19 impacted participation in cancer screening in different ways. BreastScreen Australia services temporarily paused in the first stages of the COVID-19 lockdown which saw participation fall significantly, particularly during April. As services have now resumed, we are encouraging anyone who has received an invitation from BreastScreen to make sure they make a booking with their local BreastScreen service.

“The national cervical screening program also saw a decline and while this was expected due to the program transitioning from the two-yearly Pap smear to the five-yearly cervical screening test, the reductions during the COVID-19 lockdown are more than we would have expected. This is likely a result of fewer people attending face-to-face appointments with their GP, and therefore fewer cervical screening tests being completed.

“This decline is very concerning as it means there is a sizable portion of women who are now overdue for screening.”

Ms Varlow explained that we have had fewer bowel screening kits returned so far in 2020 than during the same January – July period last year.

“From January to July 2020, the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program has sent over 2.1 million kits to Australians, yet fewer than 700,000 have been returned.

“Currently four in 10 Australians complete their free test after they receive it in the mail. With many of us spending more time than ever at home, if you’ve received a free bowel test, now is the time to complete it.

“We know that COVID-19 has disrupted our lives and some of us may have neglected our regular health checks.



“We are urging Australians to stop putting off any health checks. If you are due or have been invited to participate in the breast, bowel or cervical screening programs, get it done and tick cancer screening off your to do list.”

Screening aims to detect cancers early, either by detecting any early precancerous signs (to stop the cancer developing in the first place) or by detecting cancers when they are small (and treatment options and survival prospects are better). This leads to improved survival for people who participate in screening.

The *Screening Saves Lives* Campaign - including radio, digital and social media advertising will run throughout Spring. Tailored materials for GPs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and for Greek, Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese speaking communities are also part of the campaign.

For more information about the campaign visit: [www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)

ENDS

\* bowel and cervical data compared 2020 with 2019, breast data compared 2020 with 2018.

For media enquiries please contact Tegan Brown on 02 8063 4143 (diverts to mobile) or email [media@cancer.org.au](mailto:media@cancer.org.au)

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

### **AIHW report Cancer screening and COVID-19 in Australia (Part 1)**

Total participation in BreastScreen January – June 2020

| <b>State</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2020</b> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| NSW          | 153,371     | 104,734     |
| Vic          | 116,450     | 76,080      |
| WA           | 52,311      | 40,367      |
| QLD          | 100,919     | 77,424      |
| SA           | 41,403      | 25,935      |
| Tas          | 14,515      | 10,239      |
| ACT          | 7,587       | 7,288       |
| NT           | 2,469       | 1,976       |
| Australia    | 489,025     | 344,043     |

Total participation in National Cervical Screening Program January – June 2020

| <b>State</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| NSW          | 242,760     | 113,238     |
| Vic          | 216,079     | 91,607      |
| WA           | 85,019      | 38,756      |
| QLD          | 159,848     | 72,486      |
| SA           | 58,458      | 24,343      |
| Tas          | 16,577      | 7,179       |
| ACT          | 14,458      | 6,816       |
| NT           | 7,062       | 4,256       |
| Australia    | 807,553     | 363,618     |

\* States and territories do not sum to Australia due to screening tests for which the state or territory is unknown

\* These data are sourced from a live database, which is updated over time, with later data supply likely to have a greater level of completeness. This means that the data in this report are considered preliminary and may differ from data are sourced at a different time

### Total participation in National Bowel Cancer Screening Program January – July 2020

| <b>State</b>     | <b>2019 invitations</b> | <b>2019 kits returned</b> | <b>2020 invitations</b> | <b>2020 kits returned</b> |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| NSW              | 600,228                 | 239,501                   | 736,462                 | 234,240                   |
| Vic              | 465,834                 | 226,234                   | 566,516                 | 191,790                   |
| WA               | 203,891                 | 90,292                    | 199,575                 | 56,366                    |
| QLD              | 399,695                 | 155,791                   | 404,012                 | 109,541                   |
| SA               | 140,274                 | 72,543                    | 152,022                 | 56,460                    |
| Tas              | 46,442                  | 23,380                    | 54,404                  | 18,902                    |
| ACT              | 27,497                  | 12,403                    | 35,890                  | 12,202                    |
| NT               | 15,779                  | 5,359                     | 29,061                  | 1,554                     |
| <b>Australia</b> | <b>1,899,641</b>        | <b>825,532</b>            | <b>2,177,945</b>        | <b>681,152</b>            |

\* States and territories do not sum to Australia due to screening tests for which the state or territory is unknown

\* These data are sourced from a live database, which is updated over time, with later data supply likely to have a greater level of completeness. This means that the data in this report are considered preliminary and may differ from data are sourced at a different time.

\* different age groups were eligible in 2019 and 2020, the numbers are not directly comparable.