

Media Release

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Screening by self-collection a ‘game-changer’ for eliminating cervical cancer in Australia

Australia has taken a major step on the way to eliminating cervical cancer, with the announcement of changes to the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) that will provide the option for all people eligible for cervical screening the choice to collect their own screening sample from next July.

From 1 July next year, Medicare will fund self-collection of NCSP tests for everyone who is eligible for cervical screening, making it easier to participate, especially for people who screen at low rates. Self-collection will become a universal option, but those who prefer to have a screening sample collected by a doctor can continue to do so.

Professor Karen Canfell, Chair of Cancer Council’s National Cancer Screening and Immunisation Committee and Director of the Daffodil Centre at Cancer Council NSW and the University of Sydney, said funding self-collection for all program participants would be a game-changer for cervical cancer elimination.

“Australia is already on track to be the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer, but by making self-collection a universal option, we should get there sooner and in a more equitable way.” Professor Canfell said.

“Currently only 52% of Australians eligible for cervical screening participate in the program, which is still well short of the 70% target recognised in the World Health Organisation’s strategy for the elimination of cervical cancer.

“Participation is significantly lower in disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous women and other communities, and in individuals experiencing socioeconomic barriers to organised screening. A universal option to use self-collection will give these people more choice and control in the screening process.

“Research shows that self-collection is a safe and effective way to increase program participation, especially in the populations where we know screening rates are lower. This announcement is a huge step forward.”

Professor Canfell reminded all women who are overdue for a cervical screening test to follow up as soon as possible. “The changes from next July are a great step forward but people overdue for a screening test should not delay and are urged to talk with their doctor as they may be eligible to collect their own sample for screening now.”

Tanya Buchanan, CEO, Cancer Council Australia commended the Australian Government for its leadership in cervical cancer control in Australia and internationally.

“This is a great step towards the elimination of cervical cancer in Australia. As the federal election approaches, Cancer Council would like to see funding of targeted community-led engagement and communication activities to promote cervical screening self-collection for those who are under-screened to ensure that no one is left behind,” she said.

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For more information please contact:

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

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