

Get behind bowel screening

FACT SHEET



Background

We're asking the Australian Government to expand the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) to include two-yearly screening for everyone over 50 by 2012.

The Issue

Bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in both women and men:

- 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).

Bowel Cancer is the second most common cause of cancer related death in Australia, yet it doesn't get the attention it deserves:

- Over 3800 Australians die from bowel cancer each year
- It kills 80 Australians every week

The NBCSP provides enormous potential to save lives from bowel cancer, potential that will not be fully realised without increased funding and a clear plan for program expansion. The Government has said it plans to fully implement the program; however there has been no timetable or implementation plan and the current program funding provision expire in December

At present only three age groups (50, 55 or 65) are receiving one-off screening. This is contrary to national health guidelines, which recommend screening at least every two years from the age of 50. This means around five million Australians aged over 50 are missing out on a test that could potentially save their life. Or put another way every year full implementation is delayed, 1500 people die unnecessarily.

The Government has the ability to save more than 30 lives every week if they commit to funding two-yearly bowel screening for all Australians over 50. For a screening program to potentially avoid one third of all deaths from a highly prevalent cancer is an excellent result and one of the best opportunities government will have in a generation to reduce the impact of cancer in Australia.

Both the federal Labor and Coalition parties announced a plan to phase in bowel cancer screening as part of their 2004 election campaigns. It is good that both sides of politics in Australia are committed in principle to the program. However, both the Coalition and Labor Governments should, in our view, have allocated greater funding over the past five years to ensure that the program's implementation was by now further advanced and that we had a long-term implementation plan.

The Challenge

We seek a commitment from both the Government and opposition – including the level of funding they would allocate towards the program – in the lead-up to the next election, when they are in a position to back up their support for the program with a specific funding commitment.