

How you can help get bowel cancer screening better funded

Demand Treasury ends the delays in program expansion

Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan has invited “Australian families, individuals, businesses and community groups to submit their ideas and priorities for the 2012-13 Budget”.

This is an opportunity for supporters of bowel cancer screening to call for an urgently needed expansion to the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program from 2012-13.

Background

Australians are dying unnecessarily every week because of lengthy delays to the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program’s expansion – simply because the Government will not allocate funding to add new age groups to the program.

The program’s introduction was an election commitment from both Labor and the Coalition way back in 2004. More than seven years later the program remains restricted to a one-off test for people turning 50, 55 and 65, instead of biennial screening for all Australians aged 50 and over as recommended by the Government’s own National Health and Medical Research Council.

Our recommendation

As a step towards full implementation of the program Cancer Council Australia is asking the Government to invest an additional \$15 million per annum to add 60- and 70-year-olds from July 2012. This would immediately detect easy-to-treat cancers and precancerous conditions in people in those age groups who will otherwise be diagnosed at a late stage when their prognosis will be poor.

It is a very modest investment in a program that is already saving substantial numbers of lives – the lives of many otherwise healthy Australians in their 50s and 60s who continue to make a valuable contribution to our economy and community.

To put the funding proposal into context, it would cost the average Australian taxpayer a little over 1c a week to screen 60- and 70-year-olds for bowel cancer. Or, to put it another way, this life-saving measure equates to around .004% (or one/twenty-five thousandth) of the \$380 billion in taxpayer funds that the Australian Government is projected to spend next financial year.

How you can assist

A personalised letter from you to the Department of Treasury will help show the Government that the Australian community demands action on bowel cancer screening. Over the page are the address details and other information, and some points that you could add to explain why an expanded bowel cancer screening program is important to you.

Let your MP know you care

We also strongly encourage you to send a copy of your submission to your local federal MP. [Click here](#) to view contact details for all federal MPs.

Treasury address details

You can send your letter to Treasury either c/o:

Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Or by email to: prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au

The deadline for submissions is Friday, 27 January 2012.

Key points to consider in your letter

The more you personalise your letter, the more the Government will realise that an expansion to the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is important to you and to other members of the community. Including the following may help you personalise your letter:

- Brief background on who you are e.g. cancer survivor, voting Australian etc
- Describe your personal reason for supporting this cause

Here are some generic points that you might want to include to emphasise why you are demanding an expansion to the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program:

- Bowel cancer is the nation's second-biggest cancer killer, yet it is relatively easy to treat if detected early. Why then hasn't bowel cancer screening been more of a priority for the Australian Government?
- 4000 Australians will die this year of a bowel cancer that could have been treated successfully if caught early – why isn't the Australian Government spending my tax dollar on reducing this number by expanding the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program?
- \$15 million to add 60- and 70-year-olds to the program and immediately begin to save people's lives is a very modest investment in a federal budget of \$380 billion dollars. Saving lives ought to be the Government's no.1 priority.
- It is Australia's most expensive cancer, costing an estimated \$1 billion each year to the health system – mostly in taxpayer-funded pharmaceutical and hospital costs. By expanding the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program the Australian Government could reduce health system expenditure and save lives.
- The Government is clearly interested in men's health, with initiatives such as the Men's Sheds program. More than 2000 Australian men are dying each year from bowel cancer. Screening more of them will save their lives and also engage them in the health system.
- You are aware that Cancer Council Australia refers to the delays in expanding the screening program as the biggest hole in Australia's national cancer framework.