

SUPPORT  
RESEARCH  
**ADVOCACY**  
AWARENESS  
EDUCATION



Bowel Cancer Australia



## Position Statement: National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP)

**Bowel Cancer Australia (BCA) supports population based screening for people aged 50 years and over using an immunochemical test kit at least once every two years in accordance with National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Guidelines as a way to reduce the number of Australians dying from the disease.**

**BCA calls on the Federal Government to fully implement a comprehensive National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) supported by a national public education and awareness campaign without delay.**

**In the absence of a fully implemented NBCSP, BCA recommends Australians undertake their own screening via their GP or through BCA's national BowelScreen Australia® program.**

Currently, the Government funded NBCSP invites one-off participation from people turning 50, 55 and 65 between January 2011 and December 2014.

This in contrast to NHMRC guidelines - screening with FOBT performed at least once every two years, which is recommended for the Australian population over 50 years of age – and the peak body for gastroenterologists, Gastroenterological Society of Australia.<sup>1 2</sup>

BCA remains concerned by the continuation of a one-off, piecemeal screening program that excludes about 5.4 million Australians.<sup>3</sup>

### Timeline

BCA recognises the importance of trialling a population based screening program. However, the NBCSP has been in an interim, incomplete form since 2002.

We know from other screening programs that implementation can occur in a timely manner - breast cancer screening was fully implemented within five years and has been highly successful.

- 2002 - Pilot program commenced.
- 2006 - NBCSP launched for people turning 55 and 65.
- 2008 - NBCSP extended for people turning 50, 55 and 65.
- 2009 - NBCSP suspended for six months due to faulty test kits.
- 2010 - Federal Government allows NBCSP to lapse at end of December.
- 2011 - July: Federal Government announces the re-commencement of the NBCSP for people turning 50, 55 and 65.

### Results

An evaluation of outcomes from the NBCSP between August 2006 and January 2010 found:<sup>4</sup>

- That of the 1,678,911 invitations issued, 679,528 people participated (40.5% vs. 57% for breast cancer and 61% for cervical cancer);
- 47,177 (6.9%) people returned positive tests requiring further investigation;
- 9,548 (33.6%) polyps identified and awaiting further results; and
- 291 (1%) cancers were confirmed as well as an additional 979 (3.4%) suspected cancers.

## Recommendations

BCA strongly recommends the full implementation of the NBCSP by the Federal Government. Bowel cancer is one of the few preventable cancers that we can effectively screen for.

People who have received a free screening test kit from the Federal Government are encouraged to participate in the NBCSP. However, as this is only a one-off screening, other screening options are recommended the remainder of the time.

Those Australians aged 50 years and over who are ineligible for the NBCSP can access a bowel cancer screening test through the BowelScreen Australia® program. The program is available and easily accessible to all Australians (including those under the age of 50 years) via participating community pharmacies.

Bowel cancer screening is recommended for people:

- Aged 50 years and over.
- With no symptoms.
- With no personal or family history of bowel cancer or polyps.

## Young people and bowel cancer

While the risk of bowel cancer increases with age, approximately 1,000 Australians under 50 years are diagnosed with the cancer each year. Incidence rates are increasing in young people and BCA will continue to monitor this trend. We will explore the options for extension of our screening recommendations to younger age groups if and when the evidence shows a clear need for this.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted people under 50 years can participate in bowel cancer screening through BowelScreen Australia®.

## Further information

**BowelScreen Australia®**

<http://www.bowelscreenaustralia.org>

**The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP)**

<http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/internet/screening/publishing.nsf/Content/bowel-about>

<sup>1</sup> NHMRC. *Guidelines for the Prevention, Early Detection and Management of Colorectal Cancer*, Sydney 2005.

<sup>2</sup> GESA, *Early detection, screening and surveillance for bowel cancer*, third edition, re-printed 2011

<sup>3</sup> Bowel Cancer Coalition *Spotlight on Screening – the importance of early diagnosis*, June 2010

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2010. *National Bowel Cancer Screening Program: annual monitoring report 2009 data supplement 2010*. Cancer series no. 57. Cat. no. CAN 53. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2010. *ACIM (Australian Cancer Incidence and Mortality) Book*. AIHW: Canberra.