

## **The RCPA supports the Government's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program**

[The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia](#) (RCPA) strongly supports the Government's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (the Program), and encourages individuals who are in the eligible age group criteria to utilise the kits they receive. A new immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT) kit was introduced into the extension of the National Bowel Screening Program from 2 January 2018. The Program is currently testing approximately 100,000 eligible individuals per month, however the aim is to substantially increase these numbers within the next two years.

Dr Michael Harrison, spokesperson for the RCPA, said,

"The Program has been running now for over 10 years however, it has recently been expanded to offer the kits to more people between the ages of 50 and 74. The plan is, by next year, to offer everyone a test on their even birthday between 50 and 74. In 2018, two new age cohorts (62 and 66 years old) will begin to receive the new kit in addition to those already in the Program and, in 2019, 52 and 56 year olds will be added. The Program will target everyone at a two yearly interval from 2020.

"The early detection of bowel cancer is key; if found early, more than 90% of bowel cancers can be successfully treated. About 40% of bowel screening kits are currently returned and the best way to reduce deaths from bowel cancer would be to increase this percentage. Currently just over one million samples a year are tested with about six to seven percent of those individuals having a positive test indicating that they have blood detected in their motions. As well as bowel cancer this can be caused by things such as haemorrhoids and polyps. In 2014, about 0.7% of these persons with blood detected in their motions had colorectal cancer. By the time the roll-out of the Program is completed in 2020, the kits will be sent to 2.5-3 million people each year. If more than half of those individuals respond, then we will be testing between 1.25 and 1.5 million people per year.

"By 2020, everyone between the ages of 50 and 74 will be offered a test every second year. We know that if you detect an early lesion, a pre-cancerous lesion or an early cancer then most of these people are cured. The bowel cancer screening program is effective and it leads to a substantial reduction in loss of life."

The Program is a population-based screening program that aims to detect bowel cancer early and, therefore, reduce the number of Australians who die each year from the disease. The Program commenced in 2006. The new kit sample collection method, which launched earlier this year, is similar to the previous kit used in the Program, however the user-friendliness has been enhanced and improvements have been made drawing on the lessons learnt and feedback from Program participants, focus groups, experts, stakeholders and advisory group members. Those who are eligible are invited by mail to complete a test kit at home and send it in for analysis.

“It is estimated that over 500 people’s lives a year are saved each year due to the Program. Obviously, the testing is now aimed at a younger and wider age group including people who are still in the workforce, therefore the opportunities of early detection are significant. If you catch bowel cancer early, then it is often treatable, and that saves lives, which is vital and it is also cost-effective to screen as these tests are very low cost,” concluded Dr Harrison.

Australia has one of the highest incidences of bowel cancer in the world. Bowel cancer is a malignant growth occurring generally in the lining of the large bowel – it is the second biggest cancer killer in Australia. If bowel screening participation rates in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program increases to 60% in Australia, up to 90,000 lives could be saved over the next 40 years.

For further information on the RCPA, visit [www.rcpa.edu.au](http://www.rcpa.edu.au) or see our updates on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) - [@PathologyRCPA](#) or [Instagram](#) - [@the\\_rcpa](#).

**References:**

<http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/internet/screening/publishing.nsf/Content/NBCSP-test-kit>

**About the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia:**

The RCPA is the leading professional organisation representing pathologists, medical specialists and scientists who provide pathology testing in Australasia. Its mission is to train and support pathologists and to improve the use of pathology testing to achieve better healthcare.

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