



Media Release

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People missed for screening unacceptable to Bowel Cancer New Zealand

Bowel Cancer New Zealand is alarmed at the rising number of people affected by the screening error now estimated at 15,000 Waitemata residents. Following OIA requests by journalists, the patient-led charity raised concerns in March about 10,500 people the Ministry had apparently not invited for screening. This figure has now risen to 15,000 including 2,500 who have since been tracked down.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand (BCNZ) spokesperson Mary Bradley says, "It is now more imperative than ever the Ministry of Health's review is thorough and transparent. The New Zealand public has a right to know what measures were taken to correct the address error and what will be done to prevent this from happening in the future."

The charity continues to support a nationwide bowel screening rollout as New Zealand cannot afford any more delays with 1,200 people dying each year. Recommendations from the review will need to be implemented immediately to ensure there are no further errors.

Bradley says, "Let's be clear, we will already be waiting four years until 2021 for the last five DHBs to get screening. It's time for the Ministry to be much more transparent and to listen to peoples' concerns – journalists should not be needing to make repeated OIA requests before the Ministry explains what has occurred."

BCNZ questions why people in the target age range in screening areas cannot self-refer to the screening programme – rather than relying on people having up-to-date addresses registered with GPs or public hospitals. BCNZ is concerned that all eligible New Zealanders have access to screening – and that includes groups who can face barriers to accessing GPs, such as people on low incomes and Māori and Pacific New Zealanders.

BCNZ encourages open discussion about any bowel cancer symptoms with health professionals. Symptoms include:

- Bleeding from the bottom or seeing blood in the toilet after a bowel motion;
- Change of bowel motions over several weeks without returning to normal;
- Persistent or periodic severe pain the abdomen;
- A lump or mass in the abdomen;
- Tiredness and loss of weight for no particular reason;
- Anaemia.

Those who don't live in DHB screening areas or have symptoms or a family history of bowel cancer and want to do regular checks can talk to their GP or buy a commercially available bowel screening kit, which involves the family doctor, at Life or Unichem pharmacies.

More information on bowel cancer and BCNZ can be found at <http://www.beatbowelcancer.org.nz>

For further information:

Mary Bradley, Communications Manager

Bowel Cancer New Zealand (BCNZ)

+64 21 027 51924

<mailto:mary.bradley@beatbowelcancer.org.nz>

About Bowel Cancer New Zealand

- Bowel Cancer New Zealand (BCNZ) is a patient and family-led charity organisation.
- The registered charity was founded in 2010 by a group of people affected by bowel cancer, committed to improving bowel cancer awareness and outcomes for people with the disease.
- BCNZ aims to provide clear and up-to-date information about the disease, symptoms, what to do if diagnosed and to support patients and families affected by bowel cancer.
- The ultimate aim of BCNZ is to prevent lives being lost to this disease and to promote the national screening program rollout in New Zealand.