



Media Release

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Waitemata DHB warnings ignored by Ministry of Health

Bowel Cancer New Zealand is deeply concerned the Ministry of Health ignored repeated warnings by Waitemata DHB that there were issues with people being invited for bowel cancer screening.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand (BCNZ) spokesperson Sarah Derrett says, "It is unacceptable that warnings were ignored about the system not working. Of the more than 12,000 people not invited, 2441 were tracked down and cases of bowel cancer were then diagnosed among this group."

The charity questions what measures are being taken to track down the remaining 10,349 people identified as 'uncontactable' by the Waitemata DHB for its pilot screening programme. It seems the plan is simply to re-invite these people when, and if, their address is updated. There needs to be action taken now to trace this large missing group – among which there are likely to be people with currently undiagnosed bowel cancer.

Derrett says, "It is imperative this is addressed without delay!"

BCNZ expects the review will provide clarity and accountability on how over 12,000 people missed out on a bowel screening invite.

"No-one is debating the need for a safe screening programme. What we are questioning is why, when the ministry has had since 2011 to iron out any problems with a screening programme, they are still finding reasons to delay a rollout? Meanwhile, over 1200 people are losing their lives to bowel cancer each year," says Derrett.

BCNZ encourages open discussion about bowel cancer with medical professionals and avoiding 'sitting on your symptoms'. 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>

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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.