

**Media Release**  
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**Cancer agency welcomed but now the real work begins**

Bowel Cancer New Zealand welcomes the Government's announcement yesterday of a national control agency and a funding boost for Pharmac.

Bowel Cancer NZ general manager Rebekah Heal says, "We want to see a cancer agency empowered to make change happen and to deliver for bowel cancer patients. Currently we are seeing a health system struggling to deliver consistent care nationwide, leading to a postcode lottery in where you live affects the timeliness of diagnosis and the quality of the bowel cancer care you receive. This has to change."

There are inequities in cancer care and outcomes experienced by Māori and Bowel Cancer NZ supports calls made by Hei Āhuru Mōwai, the Māori Cancer Leadership Board, for genuine partnership and equal decision-making power for Māori in the new agency.

To achieve the aims of the 10 year cancer action plan of consistent and modern cancer care; equitable survival outcomes; fewer cancers and better cancer survival overall, there needs to be a real focus on accelerating the timeline for the National Bowel Screening Programme rollout and urgently reducing the screening age to 50 years old.

Heal says, "The 10 year plan is a step in the right direction but now the work has to really begin. It is past time that bowel cancer was prioritised and we want to see, as a matter of urgency, the National Bowel Screening Programme timeline accelerated as hundreds of thousands of people are still missing out on this life saving screening."

Bowel Cancer NZ thanks Blair and Melissa Vining for their dedication and hard work in getting 140,000 signatures on their petition advocating for better cancer care in NZ, which has led to the establishment of a cancer agency.

Bowel Cancer NZ spokesperson Mary Bradley says, "A huge thanks is owed to Blair and Melissa for their hard work in driving this, although we know they wanted to see more bowel screening and for the age to be lowered, as does Bowel Cancer NZ. If this agency is serious about prevention and addressing inequities in care then bowel cancer screening has to be a key focus for them."

The cross party support of the new cancer agency means it will have the time it needs to deliver results. Bowel Cancer NZ now wants to see the politicisation of cancer services put aside and the focus put on delivering a world class health system.

"At the end of the day what politicians often forget in their quest to get a party 'win' is that real lives are at stake here and patients should be at the heart of all health services. Our country has the worst rates of bowel cancer death in the world and that is completely unacceptable," Bradley says.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand 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.

More information on bowel cancer and Bowel Cancer New Zealand can be found at <http://www.bowelcancernz.org.nz>

**For further information:**

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**About Bowel Cancer New Zealand**

- Bowel Cancer New Zealand 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.
- Bowel Cancer New Zealand 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 Bowel Cancer New Zealand is to prevent lives being lost to this disease and to promote the national screening program rollout in New Zealand.

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