



Media Release
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Bowel Cancer New Zealand wants action to right inequities

Bowel Cancer New Zealand calls on the Ministry of Health to prove equitable health care is a priority for the government on World Cancer Day. The inaugural report released this week by Te Aho o Te Kahu, (the Cancer Control Agency) confirmed what is well known, inequities exist in cancer care for Māori and Pasifika peoples.

Cancer advocates, including Bowel Cancer New Zealand, have consistently campaigned for Māori to join the National Bowel Screening Programme from 50 years old. The Ministry rejected these calls, despite their expert advisory group recommending the minimum age for bowel screening be dropped from 60 to 50 for Māori and Pasifika peoples.

Urgent action from the government to address this inequity will signal how serious they are about making changes to cancer care in line with the Te Aho o Te Kahu report.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand medical advisor, public health clinician and Invercargill GP, Dr Sue Crengle says, "As this report shows bowel cancer incidence has been increasing among Māori and falling for the non-Māori population since 1996. Compared with non-Māori, a greater proportion of Māori bowel cancer occurs before bowel screening starts at age 60, and the bowel screening programme does not achieve equitable screening outcomes for Māori.

"As a result of both of these issues, the bowel screening programme is increasing bowel cancer inequities for Māori people. This is unacceptable. Part of the solution is to lower the screening age to 50 years for Māori and Pasifika peoples. The government acknowledges this, yet frustratingly, still refuses to act. As a result, the screening programme that continues to roll out nationwide is inequitable and discriminatory towards Māori".

The current state of the country's cancer-care system with a focus on bowel cancer shows much still needs to be done. Te Aho o Te Kahu chief executive, Professor Diana Sarfati said, "There needs to be continued work in addressing inequities, strengthening prevention, expanding screening and improving diagnosis and treatment for cancer." Dropping the bowel screening age to 50 years old for Māori now, and all New Zealanders as soon as possible would go a long way to getting this work underway.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand chairperson Stefan Corbett says, "There is no doubt investment is desperately needed in cancer care in New Zealand. Bowel screening and cancer treatments have been sorely underfunded for years, and we need action on this now. Bowel cancer has remained

unchanged as the second biggest cancer killer for the last decade in Aotearoa, and yet there have been no new drugs funded in the last 20 years.

“We have seen multiple reviews, reports and research, and still nothing changes. Bowel cancer patients are demanding, and deserve to see, investment from the government to stop 1200 Kiwis dying from this disease every year.”

END

Bowel Cancer NZ 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 in the abdomen;
- A lump or mass in the abdomen;
- Tiredness and loss of weight for no particular reason;
- Anaemia.

Those who have a family history of bowel cancer or want to do regular checks, can talk to their GP or buy a commercially available bowel screening kit from our website. However, if you have symptoms, we advise seeing your GP immediately. More information on bowel cancer and Bowel Cancer NZ can be found at <http://www.bowelcancernz.org.nz>

For further information:

Mary Bradley, Communications Manager, Bowel Cancer New Zealand
+64 21 027 51924

About Bowel Cancer New Zealand

- Bowel Cancer New Zealand (NZ) is a patient-focused 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 NZ aims to provide clear and up-to-date information about the disease, symptoms, what to do if diagnosed, and support patients and families affected by bowel cancer.
- The ultimate aim of Bowel Cancer NZ is to prevent lives being lost to this disease and to promote the national screening program rollout in New Zealand.