



**Media Release**  
**April 28, 2022**

### **Cancer medicines report highlights how far there is still to go**

The report released today by Te Aho o Te Kahu (the Cancer Control Agency) [\*Understanding the Gap: an analysis of the availability of cancer medicines in Aotearoa\*](#) is a small step in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand general manager Rebekah Heal says, "Imagine re-mortgaging your home so your family can spend another Christmas together. This report covers the bare minimum of what medicines are needed. People who have been told they have bowel cancer and need unfunded drugs come under huge financial pressure at an extremely difficult time."

After 20 years of no new funded bowel cancer drugs, only Cetuximab was identified as deserving of funding in the report, and even that was limited to first-line therapy. In particular, Bevacizumab has been shown to increase survivability and is funded in Australia but was not included in today's report.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand medical advisor and oncologist Dragan Damianovich says, "This analysis has failed to show the actual gaps in survival between New Zealand and other OECD countries, particularly Australia. We know approximately 40 per cent of New Zealand bowel cancer sufferers die from this cancer every year compared to 25 per cent in Australia."

This report highlights the urgency needed for the Government to increase Pharmac funding for bowel cancer drugs.

Dr Damianovich says, "We need look no further than what is spent on medicines in this country. Relative to GDP, NZ spends only 0.34 per cent on medicines (OECD 1.4 per cent), NZ spends only 5.4 per cent of the total health budget on medicines (OECD 16 per cent), and NZ spends US\$136 per capita (OECD US\$647). Of 36 OECD countries, only Mexico spends less than NZ."

Heal says, "It's time for change. At the moment, Pharmac uses its statutory objective to decide which drugs it funds. But the problem is patients don't have a say in this. At Bowel Cancer New Zealand, we know how desperately this needs to change. The sad truth about advanced bowel cancer in this country is that time really is money."

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 available 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:**

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**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.