

Media Release

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Bowel screening age for Māori and Pasifika lowered

Bowel Cancer New Zealand welcomes the news from the budget that the bowel screening age for Māori and Pasifika people will be lowered from 60 to 50 years old starting in 2023. The government initiative will be launched in selected regions this year to assess how best to achieve a high participation rate before it is extended nationally from July 2023.

Commencing the Bowel Screening National Programme at 50 years for Māori and Pasifika will help fix long-standing inequities because, compared to non-Māori, a greater percentage of bowel cancers occur before the age of 60 for these ethnicities.

Bowel Cancer NZ medical advisor, Professor Sue Crengle says, “This has been a long time coming, and while it is great news it will roll out nationally in 2023, it should have happened when the screening programme was introduced.

“A worrying number of Māori and Pasifika people present with advanced stage 3 or 4 cancer, significantly lowering their chances of long-term survival - screening will help detect cancers earlier. We also welcome the focus on participation as maximising engagement for all Māori and Pasifika age groups is essential for achieving equity in bowel cancer outcomes,” Crengle said.

Bowel Cancer NZ has been calling for Māori and Pasifika to enter screening from the age of 50 since 2017, as noted in a letter to the [NZ Medical Journal](#).

Crengle says, “It has taken years of advocating by Bowel Cancer NZ, Māori and other advocates to lower the age for Māori and Pasifika. We would want to see the Ministry of Health moving much more quickly in future to correct such known inequities.”

The current screening programme is inequitable. At present, just over half of bowel cancers in Māori present before the age of 60 years (58 per cent in females and 52 per cent in males), whereas just under a third of bowel cancers in non-Māori are diagnosed before 60 (27 per cent in females and 29 per cent in males).

Rebekah Heal, Bowel Cancer NZ’s general manager, says, “We believe that by embedding equity into the decision-making processes at all levels of the health system, we can – and we must – deliver improved outcomes for bowel cancer in Aotearoa, New Zealand.”

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Bowel Cancer New Zealand (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.

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

For further information:

Mary Bradley, Communications & Fundraising manager

Bowel Cancer New Zealand

+64 21 027 51924 or mary.bradley@bowelcancernz.org.nz

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.