



Media Release

Thursday 28 September 2023

No debate – bowel screening age to be lowered

Years of advocacy for the screening age to be lowered by Bowel Cancer New Zealand has resulted in a commitment from both major political parties to bring bowel screening from 45 years old.

The charity welcomes the news from last night's leaders' debate as it will save many lives, especially with the rising incidence of bowel cancer in younger people. Bowel cancer is 90 per cent curable if caught early, and screening is an effective way of doing this.

Stefan Corbett, the Chair of Bowel Cancer New Zealand, says, "This is fantastic news and will mean fewer lives lost to this silent killer. However, the priority is for bowel screening to be fully implemented for Māori and Pasifika from age 50. The rollout is underway but is taking too long and needs to be sped up to avoid further inequities."

A commitment to lowering the bowel screening age is only the first step. The incoming government needs to set out a clear fiscal and workforce plan for implementing this.

Professor Frank Frizelle, a Bowel Cancer NZ medical advisor, says, "Bowel cancer is increasing dramatically in those aged under 50, in New Zealand and around the world, for unknown reasons. As the risk factors for the increase are as yet unknown, screening and symptom awareness are the best tools we have to reduce the impact of this trend. So the agreement for those aged 45 to be able to be screened is extremely important."

There is no debate - lowering the screening age will save countless lives through early detection.

Stage 4 bowel cancer patient Aimee-Rose Yates, 30, who was present at the leader's debate, says, "The thing is for me, it's a start, but unfortunately, I was diagnosed when I was 29. There will be more and more people like me who will continue getting diagnosed and will keep dying. Dropping the screening age will save lives; the ball is rolling – let's get it done!"

In a social post, Patrick Gower, last night's moderator, said the debate was for any families out there affected by bowel cancer.

"Last night it was super special that both leaders committed to bringing down the bowel cancer screening age. It is going to save a lot of Kiwi lives and a lot of heartache. Caught early, bowel cancer

can be beaten, and earlier screening gives people a fighting chance. Anything we can do to stop this cruel disease is crucial," says Gower.

END

Bowel cancer 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 New Zealand 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 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 New Zealand aims to provide clear and up-to-date information about the disease, symptoms, what to do if diagnosed and supports patients and whānau affected by bowel cancer.
- Bowel Cancer New Zealand aims to prevent lives from being lost to this disease and promote the national screening program rollout in New Zealand.