



Media Release

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Charity concerned by slow screening rollout for Māori and Pasifika

Bowel Cancer New Zealand (NZ) is pleased to learn the National Bowel Screening Programme has distributed over two million home-screening kits across Aotearoa, picking up 2,495 cancers.

However, the charity is concerned about the extremely slow screening rollout to 50 years for Māori and Pasifika. The government announced this initiative would be launched and trialled in selected regions in the latter half of 2022 with a more extensive rollout from July 2023.

Funding of \$36 million was announced in Budget 22 to lower the eligible start age for bowel screening from 60 to 50 years for Māori and Pacific people to address a health inequity. So, questions are being raised on why Te Whatu Ora Waikato, Te Whatu Ora Tairāwhiti, and Te Whatu Ora Midcentral are the only regional health authorities inviting Māori and Pasifika from 50.

Professor Sue Crengle, a Bowel Cancer NZ medical advisor, says, "It's extremely disappointing that in over 18 months, there have only been three districts screening Māori and Pasifika from 50."

A higher proportion of bowel cancer occurs in Māori and Pacific peoples before they reach 60 (approximately 21 per cent compared to 10 per cent for non-Māori non-Pacific peoples).

Health Minister Shane Reti said, "When you start particular sub-sections of a screening programme, there are particular requirements you have to have. It's different from actually doing a nationwide rollout. So, we're still learning, still understanding where the sweet spot for screening for Māori and Pasifika is particularly."

Bowel Cancer NZ is critical of the Minister of Health's statement since the government has previously outlined it would trial how best to achieve a high participation rate from May 2022 to July 2023.

Crengle says, “Bowel Cancer NZ wants to know whether Te Whatu Ora: Health New Zealand plans to complete this rollout urgently or whether it was just a token effort in three regions. Action is needed as far too many Māori and Pasifika are dying that could have a fighting chance if they were screened from 50.”

A clear timeline and accountability are needed from Te Whatu Ora: Health New Zealand to prevent this health inequity from continuing.

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:

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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.