

Media Release

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Driving a cultural poo-nomenon: more people bowel screening than ever before

New data shows 2 million Australians realise the importance of bowel screening

Cancer Council is aiming to normalise bowel cancer screening, with new data released today showing over two million Australians completed their bowel screening kit in 2017 and 2018.

The data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *National Bowel Cancer Screening Program Monitoring Report* showed an additional 457,000 people completed their bowel screening kit in 2017 and 2018, compared to the previous reporting period.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO of Cancer Council Australia said "Bowel cancer is the second biggest cause of cancer death in Australia, yet if detected early, nearly nine in 10 cases can be successfully treated.

"We want to take away any of the remaining stigma about the bowel screening test so that everyone completes it when it is sent to them in the mail.

"2.1 million Australians, 42 per cent of those who are eligible, completed their bowel screening test when it was sent to them in the mail and we applaud them for doing the test and encourage anyone who hasn't to follow their example.

"While this was an increase of nearly half a million people compared to the previous period, it is still less than half of those who are eligible so we want to give a clear message to those who have the kit sitting at home – do the test today.

"Completing the screening test every two years is the best way to reduce your risk of dying from bowel cancer.

"The youngest cohort who are sent the test remain the least likely to complete it. Just over three in 10 people aged 50-54 complete the test. Overall, men are also least likely to complete the test, even though they have a higher incidence rate of bowel cancer, so we really urge these groups in particular to do the test today."

The Australian government's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program sends tests in the mail to people aged 50-74 every two years. The test is completed at home and posted back for analysis.

Professor Aranda explained COVID-19 presents the perfect opportunity for anyone who has been putting off the test to do it now.

"With many of us spending more time than ever at home, now is the perfect time. Do the test today.

"Some people might be put off by the thought of doing a poo test however in reality, it is quick, clean, and easy, and it could save your life. The report showed that for those who have previously completed the test, 80 per cent complete it the next time it is sent to them, showing that the test really isn't so bad."

Cancer Council is also encouraging Australians who complete their test and receive a positive result not to delay follow-up appointments because of COVID-19. A positive result

indicates that blood has been found in the sample, it doesn't mean that you have cancer, but it is important that further checks are done.

"If your test is positive, you should not delay your follow-up appointment because of COVID-19. Health services are safe and are undertaking extra precautions to ensure your safety.

"If you have a positive result it is important that you talk to your doctor about a referral for a colonoscopy and attend your colonoscopy when this is scheduled by the hospital."

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