

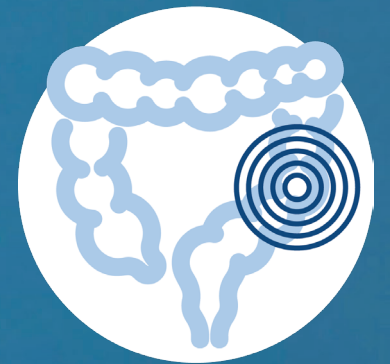
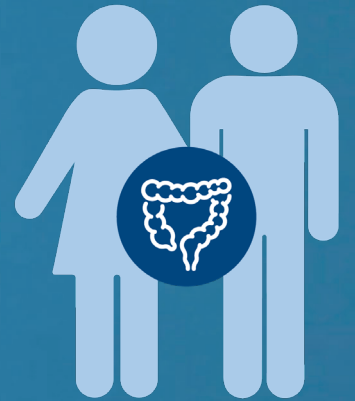


The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

Latest updates for practice managers

Bowel cancer: a significant public health issue in Australia

- Morbidity: 4th most common cancer
 - over 15,000 diagnoses each year¹
- Mortality: 2nd highest cause of cancer-related death
 - over 5,000 deaths each year¹
- One of the most expensive cancers for Australia's healthcare system
 - exceeding \$1.6 billion per year²
- Most bowel cancers are treatable if found early³



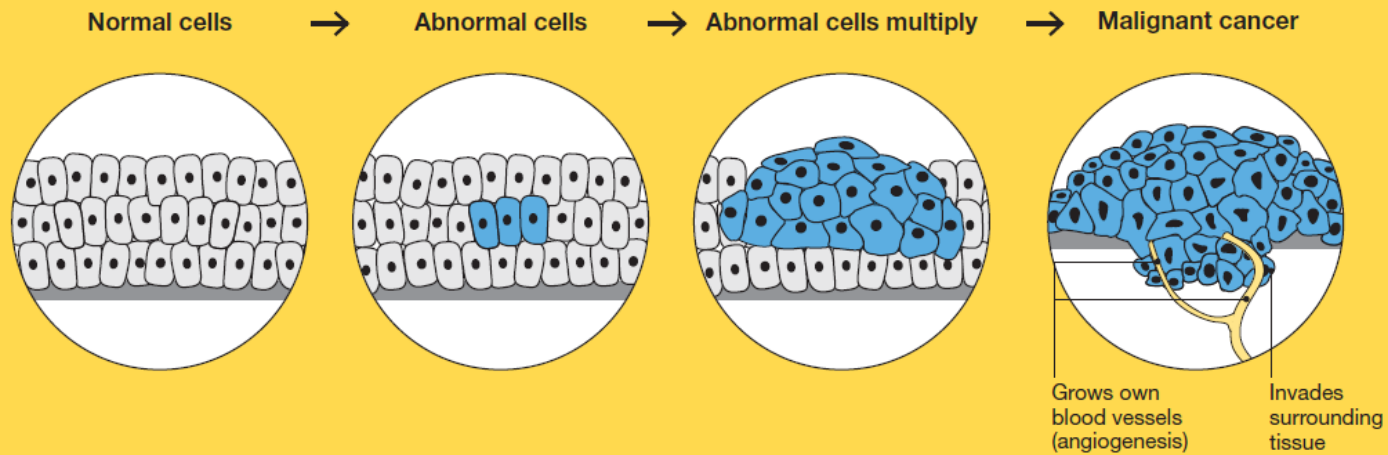
1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Cancer data in Australia*.

2) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Health system spending on disease and injury in Australia 2022-23*.

3) Cancer Australia. (2019). National Cancer Control Indicators: relative survival by stage at diagnosis (colorectal cancer).

Stages of bowel cancer progression

How cancer starts



How cancer spreads

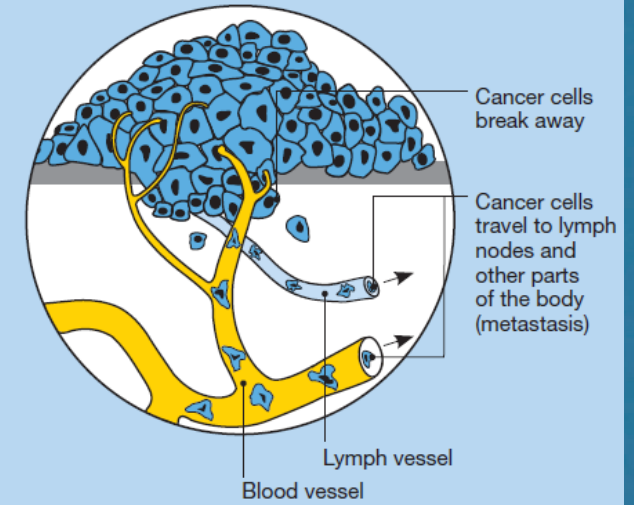
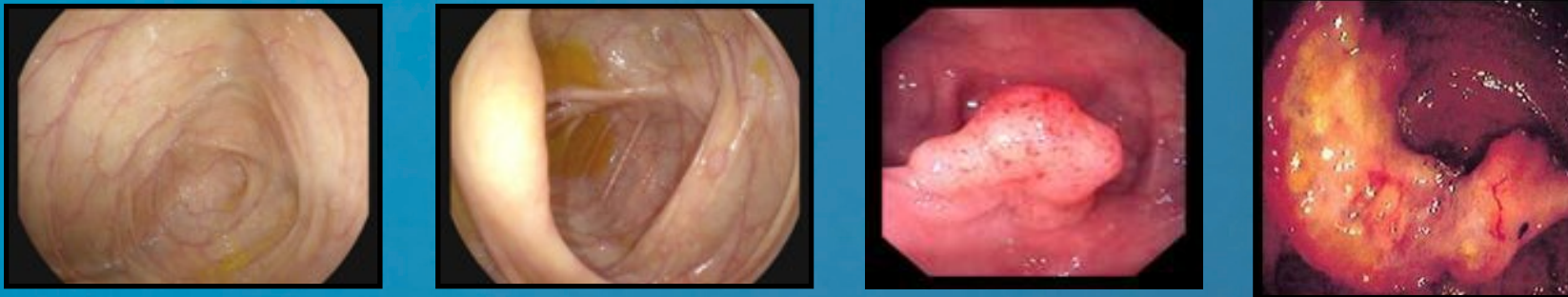


Image: Cancer Council Australia



Usually takes up to 10-15 years

Bowel screening at a population level

Population screening for bowel cancer involves testing people who have no obvious symptoms and who are at an average level of risk (approx. 95% of the population).

Differs from **diagnostic tests** carried out for people with symptoms or a significant family history of bowel cancer.

An immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT) is the recommended population screening test in Australia for people aged 45 to 74.



National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP)

- Offers biennial screening to people aged 45-74 (45-49 year olds need to opt in initially)
- NBCSP has progressively expanded from 2 to 14 eligible age groups
- 45-49 year olds became eligible from 1 July 2024



Year	Eligible age groups invited
2006	55 and 65
2008	50, 55 and 65
2011	50, 55 and 65
2013	50, 55, 60 and 65
2015	50, 55, 60, 65, 70 and 74
2016	50, 55, 60, 64, 65, 70, 72 and 74
2017	50, 54, 55, 58, 60, 64, 68, 70, 72 and 74
2018	50, 54, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 74
2019 onwards	50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 74
July 2024 onwards	50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 74 45-49 year olds eligible to join program early

Issuing of kits through the NBCSP



Currently two ways an eligible person can be issued a NBCSP kit:

- 1) **Mail out method** (usual pathway) – test kit is mailed to an eligible person's Medicare-registered address when due (or upon request)
- 2) **Alternative access to kits model (AAM)** – registered healthcare professionals or practices can bulk order NBCSP iFOBT kits and offer a kit directly to eligible people.* Helps reach under-screeners

*All kits issued via AAM must be registered in the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR), which will indicate if a patient is not eligible or due for screening.

**A person can not be issued another kit if they have already returned a valid test result for the current screening round.

Why age 45-74? Why not younger/older?

- Consideration of the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and the overall **balance of benefits to risk of harm** associated with screening
- Population screening program - benefits/risks need to be weighed up in the Australian population context
- Screening people aged 45 to 74 provides the greatest health benefit on a whole-of-population basis
- People of any age experiencing symptoms or who have a significant family history of bowel cancer, should see their doctor

Benefits of screening through the NBCSP

One register for all NBCSP activity

- Invitations, skip rounds, exclusions, Medicare sweeps
- Accessible by participants and their nominated GP/practice

Participant Follow-Up Function (PFUF) team, based in Brisbane

- Follow up participants following a positive FOBT result, ensuring they consult a GP/undergo assessment as required, within set timeframes.
- **Help minimise loss to follow up.**

Free testing

- No charge for test kit (or replacement kits if required), or associated pathology testing

Eligibility for the NBCSP

- Initially broad eligibility, based on age and Medicare listing
- Now more nuance around who is eligible/skipped/excluded each screening round

Why? Program is trying to reduce over-screening and align screening invitations in line with national guidelines.

The program is currently open to Australian residents:

- aged 45-74
- with a registered postal address with Medicare/DVA
- who don't have a skip round or exclusion in place when they are otherwise next due to screen.

Skip rounds and exclusions

A person aged 45-74 may be:

- **Skipped** (for 4 years / one screening round) if they have had a recent colonoscopy (within 18 months), **in or outside of** the NBCSP.

*Medicare sweeps identify colonoscopies performed outside of the program

- **Excluded/opted off** the NBCSP if they previously screened through the NBCSP and at colonoscopy had histopathology findings that require ongoing surveillance (cancer, adenomas).
 - Surveillance is to continue outside of the program
 - Participant can be opted back into the NBCSP in future if needed.

Skip rounds and exclusions

Importantly:

- Any skip rounds or exclusions are always communicated to the participant and their nominated GP.
- A participant (or their GP) can still request a kit, even if they are skipped/excluded.
- If there are ever any doubts about eligibility, participants can contact the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR) on 1800 627 701 or they/their GP can look up their screening record in the NCSR.

Participation in the NBCSP

Latest available NBCSP participation rates* (2021-22):

Australia – 40.0%

Queensland – 36.9%

Gold Coast HHS – 36.2%

*Captures iFOBT screening through the NBCSP only and excludes screening outside of the program.

Screening rates are often lower among:

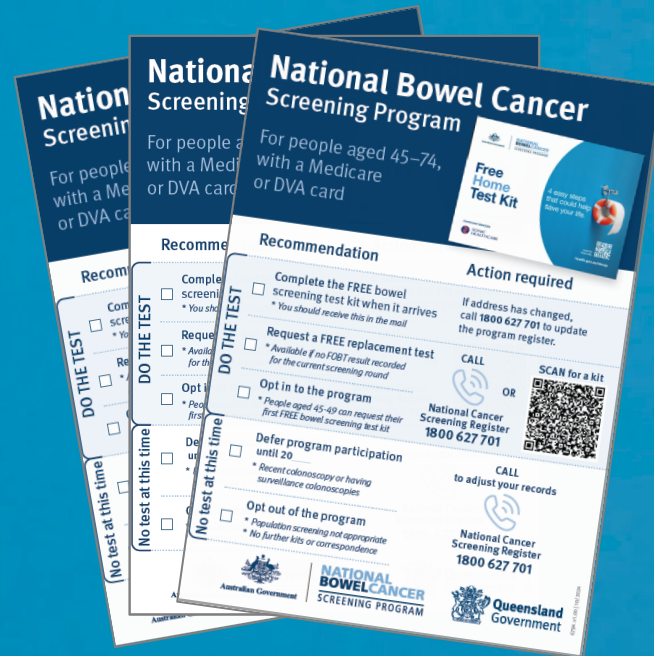
- Men
- First Nations people
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- People from rural and remote communities
- The younger eligible age cohorts, especially ages 50-59 (too early to tell for 45-49 y/o).

How can practice staff help to promote screening?

- Ensure staff are familiar with the NBCSP and how to access further information if needed
- Display promotional material throughout the practice setting - posters, tear-off pads, brochures, demo kit etc
- Run a QI activity to help increase bowel screening uptake/promotion among patients
- Offer the alternate access to kits model in your practice, to be able to issue screening kits directly to eligible patients

Practice resources

Screening recommendation
tear-off pad (GP use)



Request a kit tear-off
pad (broad use)



Demonstration kit



Many other free patient
resources available at
health.gov.au/nbcsp

See resource table - available to take away with you today

Key takeaways

- 45-49 year olds are now eligible for the NBCSP, need to opt in initially
- Most people aged 50-74 will be automatically invited to screen every 2 years or so, with some exceptions
 - If there is a skip round/exclusion in place, the patient will be informed, and a kit can still be requested
- There are two ways for kits to be issued through the program:
1) Mailout method; 2) Alternative access to kits model (AAM)
- Practice staff play an important role in a patient's decision to screen

Thank you!

An advertisement for the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. The top left features the Australian Government crest and the program name. The center left says 'Free Home Test Kit'. The center right shows a toilet paper roll with a lifebuoy around it, with text '4 easy steps that could help save your life.' Below this is a QR code and the website 'health.gov.au/nbcsp'. The bottom left shows 'PATHOLOGY SERVICES' and the 'SONIC HEALTHCARE' logo.

Australian Government

**NATIONAL
BOWELCANCER**
SCREENING PROGRAM

**Free
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scan for
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