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Media release

## **Australians unite to 'butt out' bowel cancer** **Patients and NGOs launch new bowel cancer awareness campaign**

Leading Australian bowel cancer charities and patients are hoping to save thousands of lives with the launch of a new bowel cancer awareness campaign: **No ifs. No butts. Get tested for bowel cancer.** The awareness campaign is an initiative of the Bowel Cancer Coalition and calls for Australians over the age of 50 to get tested every two years.

Julien Wiggins, CEO of Bowel Cancer Australia and Bowel Cancer Coalition member says the campaign aims to highlight to Australians the importance of taking control of their own health and to consider bowel cancer screening as routine, as it already is for other less common cancers.

"Around 4,165 Australians die from bowel cancer each year<sup>1</sup>. Doing a simple routine test at home every two years could save two lives a day<sup>1,2</sup>. It's that simple.

"Just as screening for breast and cervical cancer is now the norm, testing for bowel cancer should become routine for Australians too. That's why we really hope they heed our message - No ifs. No butts. Just get tested," said Mr Wiggins.

Professor Graham Newstead, Chair of the Colorectal Foundation and Bowel Cancer Coalition member says that discussing screening options with your family doctor is vital, especially because the current screening program is not adequate at present.

"It is well known that the risk of bowel cancer increases significantly for those over the age of 50<sup>1</sup> yet the current government screening program is currently only available for people when they turn 50, 55 and 65. Re-testing at two yearly intervals is essential.

"Australians need to understand that even though bowel cancer is the leading cause of cancer death after lung cancer, it doesn't have to be. It is completely curable if detected early and is indeed completely preventable if polyps are identified and removed. If testing at home every two years has the potential to save your life, why wouldn't you do it," says Professor Newstead.

The 'No ifs. No butts. Get tested' campaign coincides with the launch of the Bowel Cancer 2012 Challenge, by the Bowel Cancer Coalition.

The Coalition presented the Bowel Cancer 2012 Challenge to government in May.

The Bowel Cancer 2012 Challenge calls for:

- An increase in awareness of bowel cancer symptoms (currently at just 56 percent) through consumer awareness and education
- Greater GP communication and education to aid them in their provision of information to patients
- Full implementation of a biennial National Bowel Cancer Screening Program by 2012 (resulting in a

predicted drop in mortality by 15 percent)

- Increased funding of follow up colonoscopy services
- Patient involvement in the Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings about their treatment plans
- Investment in the recruitment and training of specialist bowel cancer nurses
- Less restrictive criteria for the subsidy of new bowel cancer drugs by the PBS (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme)

There are around 13,000 new cases of bowel cancer diagnosed in Australia each year<sup>1</sup> and each week around 80 people die of the disease<sup>3</sup>.

However, even if an early cancer has developed, research shows that nine out of ten early bowel cancers are successfully treated. Regular testing is vital for successful treatment as symptoms often only appear once the disease has progressed, making it difficult to treat to a full recovery. Symptoms may include blood in the toilet, change in bowel habit, abdominal pain, constipation or diarrhoea<sup>4</sup>.

The Bowel Cancer Coalition urges anyone aged over 50 years who has not had a bowel cancer test in the last two years to visit their GP or local pharmacy. Further information can also be obtained via the Bowel Cancer Australia website [www.bowelcanceraustralia.org](http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org).

The Bowel Cancer Coalition is the first time bowel cancer groups have united to tackle this killer disease. The Coalition consists of Bowel Cancer Australia, Bowelscan, Cancer Voices Australia, Let's Beat Bowel Cancer, The Colorectal Foundation, and patient, Scott Gillon.

Bowel Cancer Awareness runs from 7 to 13 June 2009.

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*The Bowel Cancer Coalition is proudly supported by Amgen, Bowel Cancer Australia, Bowelscan, Cancer Voices Australia, Carman Fine Foods, Enterix, Let's Beat Bowel Cancer, Roche Products, The Colorectal Foundation.*

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**Note to editors:**

#### **About the Coalition**

The Coalition is made up of the following bowel cancer groups:

- Bowel Cancer Australia [www.bowelcanceraustralia.org](http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org)
- Bowelscan [www.nationalbowelscan.org.au](http://www.nationalbowelscan.org.au)
- Cancer Voices Australia [www.cancervoicesaustralia.org.au](http://www.cancervoicesaustralia.org.au)
- Let's Beat Bowel Cancer [www.letsbeatbowelcancer.com](http://www.letsbeatbowelcancer.com)
- The Colorectal Foundation [www.getscreened.com.au](http://www.getscreened.com.au)
- Scott Gillon, Patient

The Bowel Cancer Coalition formed in a bid to:

- Raise awareness of the risk of bowel cancer

- Reduce the number of people affected by bowel cancer
- Improve the lives of patients with bowel cancer
- Ensure there is significant policy emphasis on bowel cancer prevention as well as support for people diagnosed with the disease
- Advocate government investment in R&D and clinical trials to be in line with bowel cancer's relative burden of disease
- For more information visit the Coalition website: [www.bowelcancercoalition.org](http://www.bowelcancercoalition.org)

#### About bowel cancer

- Bowel cancer is the most common cancer affecting both men and women in Australia
- There are around 13,000 new cases of bowel cancer diagnosed in Australia each year
- Bowel cancer is Australia's second biggest cancer killer after lung cancer
- Around 4,100 Australians die from bowel cancer each year – that's 80 people every week
- Symptoms may include: bleeding, change in bowel habits, pain, constipation or diarrhoea
- Symptoms however often only appear once disease has progressed making it difficult to treat to full recovery
- Early detection through screening greatly increases chances of survival. Research shows 9 out of 10 bowel cancers detected early are successfully treated.

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#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Bowel Cancer Australia website. [http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/bowel\\_cancer/bowel02.html#fact](http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/bowel_cancer/bowel02.html#fact). Accessed 25 May 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health & Welfare & Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing 2008. National Bowel Screening Program monitoring report 2008, Cancer Series 44, Cat. No. 40. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health & Welfare & Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing 2008. National Bowel Screening Program monitoring report 2008, Cancer Series 44, Cat. No. 40. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>4</sup> Bowel cancer Australia website. [http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/bowel\\_cancer/bowel02.html#symptoms](http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/bowel_cancer/bowel02.html#symptoms). Accessed 25 May 2009.