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Media release

## **New report predicts thousands of avoidable deaths from bowel cancer over the next three years**

*Cancer groups unite to call for government to take action*

Thousands of Australian lives are being put at risk every year because of a lack of funding and government action, according to a new report released today by the Bowel Cancer Coalition.

The report predicts that under the current bowel cancer screening program, as many as 5.4million<sup>1</sup> Australians will miss out on life saving screening as the program currently stands.

Under the united banner of the Bowel Cancer Coalition, five independent, non-profit bowel cancer organisations have joined together to release the **Bowel Cancer 2012 Challenge** in the lead up to Bowel Cancer Awareness Week.

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

The report challenges government to fully implement the National Bowel Screening Program, making free, at home self-test kits available to all Australians over 50 years, every two years. The screening program is currently only available for people turning 50, 55 and 65.

Julien Wiggins, CEO of Bowel Cancer Australia and Bowel Cancer Coalition member says the Coalition is committed to ensuring the screening program is available to all who need it.

“Just as screening for breast and cervical cancer is now the norm, testing for bowel cancer should become routine for Australians too.

“Bowel cancer kills approximately one person every two hours<sup>2</sup>, which makes it vitally important that action is taken.

“Through the 2012 Challenge the Coalition hopes to reduce the number of deaths to bowel cancer by up to 2,000 each year<sup>3</sup>,” says Mr Wiggins.

Professor Graham Newstead, Chair of the Colorectal Foundation and Bowel Cancer Coalition member says the government must take a multi-layered approach if bowel cancer deaths are to be reduced.

“The lack of awareness among Australians about bowel cancer is shocking, with a massive 44 percent not aware of any bowel cancer symptoms they should be looking out for,” says Newstead.

“It is vital the government places a significant emphasis on increasing this awareness through GP and consumer education and training, whilst encouraging the promotion of the national screening program. In addition, investment in support services for bowel cancer patients such as bowel cancer nurses will go a long way in improving patient outcomes,” continued Newstead.

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
- 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)

Bowel cancer is the most common cancer in Australia<sup>4</sup> to affect both men and women. It is the leading cause of cancer death after lung cancer, killing around 80 people every week, or one person every two hours<sup>2</sup>.

Research shows that nine out of ten bowel cancers are successfully treated when detected early. 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>5</sup>.

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 week runs from 7 to 13 June 2009.

-ENDS-

*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> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, 'TABLE 9. Estimated Resident Population By Single Year Of Age, Australia', time series spreadsheet, Cat. no. 3201.0, viewed 25 May 2009

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3201.0Jun%202008?OpenDocument>

<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> Minister for Health & Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon, Free bowel cancer tests will save lives, Media Release, 8 May 2008

<sup>4</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>5</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