

Spotlight on Screening

The Importance of Early Diagnosis
June 2010



The Challenge

In May 2009, the National Bowel Cancer Coalition launched the Bowel Cancer 2012 Challenge. An important policy-shaping consensus statement, the Challenge called for, among other things, improved uptake of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, and its extension to provide free two-yearly screening for every Australian aged 50 and over.

The Call to Action

The National Bowel Cancer Coalition acknowledges that progress, albeit slow, has been made in rolling out the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. However, there is much more to do. Participation remains low, resulting in missed opportunities to diagnose and treat bowel cancer at a stage where it is still curable.

The National Bowel Cancer Coalition's call to action for Government and policy makers by 2012 is to -

- Overhaul the Program to restore **public confidence** following the faulty test kit debacle.
- Provide life saving **screening** to the **5.4 million** Australians who are currently missing out.
- Implement a **comprehensive national awareness campaign** to promote participation in a fully operational Program.
- Prevent as many as **2,000 deaths** from bowel cancer every year.

These ambitious goals can be delivered simply by bringing bowel cancer screening into line with other national cancer screening programs and increasing the national average participation rate.

A Screening Lottery ... Will you miss out?

- Only Australians turning 50, 55 or 65 are eligible to receive a free bowel cancer screening test kit as part of the Government's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.
- As many as **5.4 million**¹ Australians are currently missing out on life saving screening because of a lack of funding and government action.
- While the Government has made an open-ended commitment to fully implement the Program, funding ends in 2010-11 according to the Department of Health & Ageing Population Health Budget Statement.²
- In 2009, the Minister for Health & Ageing stated that the structure and shape of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program will not be considered until the 2011-2012 Federal Budget.³
- By the time the Budget is delivered in May 2011, another **27,512** Australians will have been diagnosed with bowel cancer and sadly **7,602** will have died from this preventable disease.

These delays continue to result in unnecessary deaths.

Lives will only be saved with the **full implementation of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program**, which provides **free two-yearly screening to all Australians aged over 50.**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Incidence	21,696	16,749	12,371	5,769	5,381	1,709	837	273	64,745
Mortality	6,569	5,844	3,899	1,814	1,812	651	271	86	20,946
Crude NBCSP 2008 participation	32.9%	37.1%	38.5%	40.8%	38.9%	43.2%	39.1%	22.3%	36.6%

Table 1: Bowel cancer incidence, mortality (2002-2006) and participation in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program by State and Territory (2008).

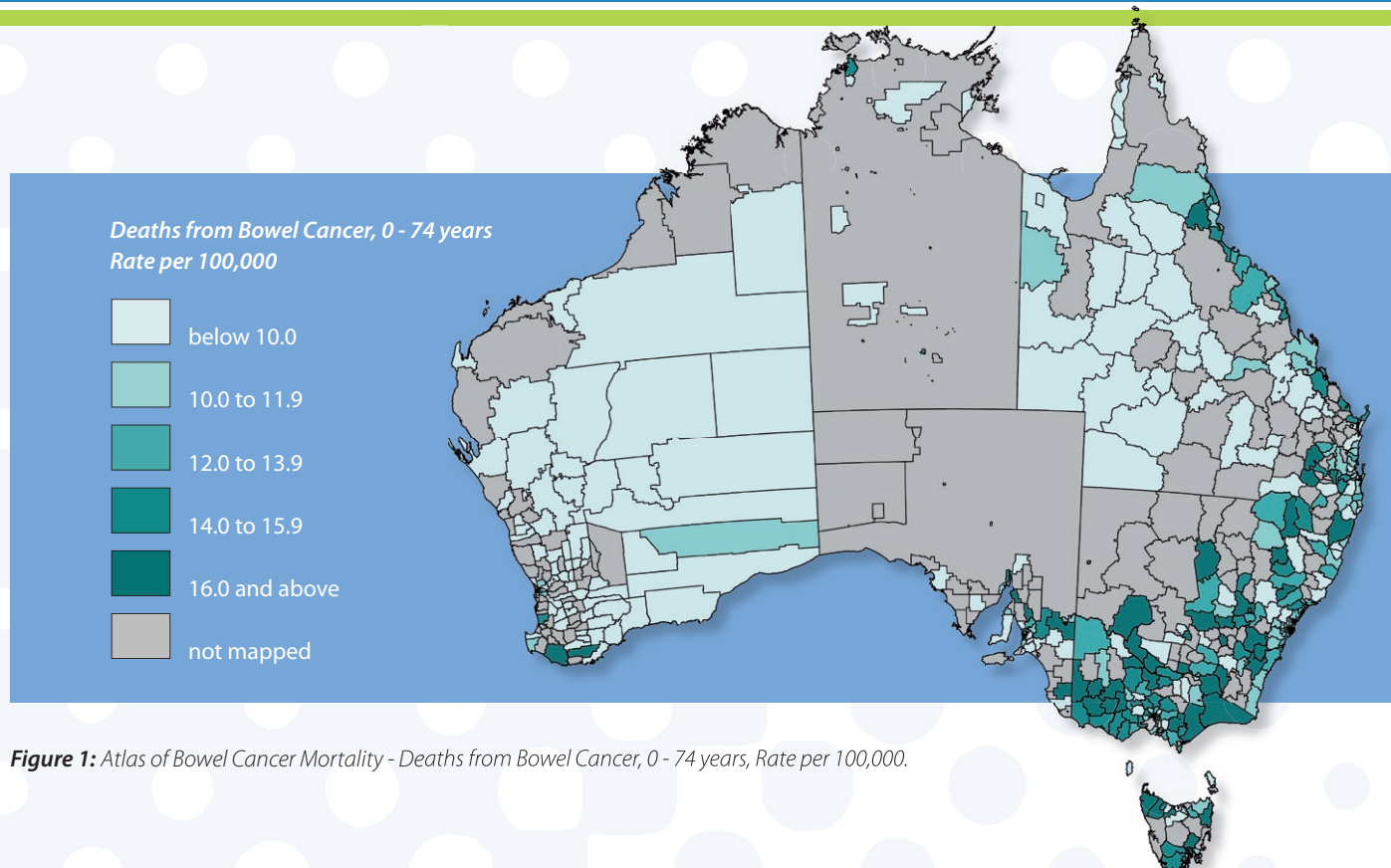


Figure 1: Atlas of Bowel Cancer Mortality - Deaths from Bowel Cancer, 0 - 74 years, Rate per 100,000.

Screening saves lives ...

Bowel cancer is Australia's second biggest cancer killer, yet 90% of cases can be successfully treated if caught early enough.

As a result of the launch of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program in 2006 –

- Over **1.6 million** people have been invited to participate in the Program and screen for bowel cancer.
- Around **1,056** people were diagnosed with bowel cancer or had suspected cancer.
- Over **11,000** people have had polyps removed, potentially preventing thousands of cancers.

The Minister for Health & Ageing even agrees that “early screening for bowel cancer has the potential to prevent as many as 2,000 deaths every year.”⁴

... and makes good economic sense

Research has shown that two-yearly FOBT screening is more effective at detecting bowel cancer; will cut mortality by 15% amongst the screened population; and is more cost effective, reducing the cost per life year saved from \$41,321 to \$36,080.⁵

According to the Minister for Health & Ageing, “effective screening will also reduce avoidable hospitalisations and reduce health system costs of treating preventable cancer in the longer term.”

“Removing a pre-cancerous polyp costs around \$1,250, while treatment at a public hospital for cancers that develop from polyps can cost more than \$23,000 a patient.”⁶

Even in its current inadequate form, research has shown that the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program has had a measurable impact in identifying early-stage cancers that are easier and far less expensive to treat, and an improvement in survival would be anticipated.⁷

NBSCP Phase	Invitations issued ⁸	Number screened ⁹	Participation	Suspected / confirmed bowel cancer	Polyps
Phase I 7 Aug 06 - 30 Jun 08	929,329	366,826	39.4%	752	7,739
Phase II¹⁰ 1 Jan 08 - 30 Dec 10	685,915	251,152	36.6%	302	3,446

Table 2: National Bowel Cancer Screening Program participation.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

- Phase I of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program was launched in 2006 offering a free bowel cancer screening test to people turning 55 and 65.
- The Program was extended during Phase II in 2008 to include people turning 50.
- In May 2009, the Program was suspended for six months due to faulty test kits.
- National Bowel Cancer Screening Program data shows that low uptake (36.6%) is a very significant issue.
- Yearly re-screening has not been implemented.

National Bowel Cancer Coalition

The National Bowel Cancer Coalition is a group of independent, non-profit organisations who have agreed to coordinate individual activities and work collaboratively to –

1. Raise awareness of the risk of bowel cancer – Australia's second biggest cancer killer.
2. Reduce the number of people affected by bowel cancer.
3. Improve the lives of patients with bowel cancer.
4. Ensure there is sufficient policy emphasis on bowel cancer prevention as well as support for people diagnosed with the disease.
5. 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
www.bowelcancercoalition.org

How does your suburb rank?

Check out our Bowel Cancer Mortality Atlas at www.bowelcancercoalition.org to compare the rate of bowel cancer in your Local Government Area.

Rank	Number	LGA Area
1	948	Brisbane, QLD
2	547	Gold Coast, QLD
3	326	Greater Geelong, VIC
4	254	Lake Macquarie, NSW
5	229	Australian Capital Territory, ACT
6	217	Wollongong, NSW
7	212	Sutherland Shire, NSW
8	208	Gosford, NSW
9	206	Blacktown, NSW / Boroondara, VIC
10	205	Stirling, WA

Table 3: Top 10 Local Government Areas – Number of deaths from bowel cancer, total population, 2002-2006

Rank	Rate	LGA Area
1	90.3	Jerilderie, NSW
2	71.7	Balranald, NSW
3	57.3	Gayndah, QLD
4	51.9	Boyup Brook, WA
5	49	Paroo, QLD
6	48.3	Bland, NSW
7	48	Weddin, NSW
8	45	Golden Plains, VIC
9	44.8	Wambo, QLD
10	44.4	Murray, NSW

Table 4: Top 10 Local Government Areas – Deaths from bowel cancer, total population, 2002-2006, rate per 100,000

1 National Bowel Cancer Coalition, New report predicts thousands of avoidable deaths from bowel cancer over the next three years, Media Release, 4 June 2009.

2 Budget Statements – Department of Health & Ageing – Section 2 – Department Outcomes – 1 Population Health, Section 2, p. 64.

3 The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health & Ageing, Hansard, House of Representatives, 7 Sept 2009, p.168.

4 The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health & Ageing, Free bowel cancer tests will save lives, Media Release, 8 May 2008.

5 Bishop J, Glass P, Tracey E, Hardy M, Warner K, Makino K, Gardois A, Wilson J, Guarnieri C, Feng J, Sartori L, Health Economics Review of Bowel Cancer Screening in Australia, Cancer Institute NSW, August 2008.

6 The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health & Ageing, Free bowel cancer tests will save lives, Media Release, 8 May 2008.

7 Ananda, S McLaughlin S et al, Initial impact of Australia's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, Medical Journal of Australia, October 2009, p.378.

8 'Invitations issued' equals the number of eligible people who were issued an invitation to screen in the NBCSP. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2008. National Bowel Cancer Screening Program monitoring report 2008. Cancer series no. 44. Cat. no. 40. Canberra: AIHW.

9 'Number screened' equals the number of people who completed an FOBT kit and had results forwarded to the NBCSP Register.

10 Phase II of the Program runs from 1 Jan 2008 to 31 Dec 2010. Program monitoring data is only available to 31 Dec 2008. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2009. National Bowel Cancer Screening Program: annual monitoring report 2009. Cancer series no. 49. Cat. no. 45. Canberra: AIHW.