

Information for Health Workers

Bowel screening and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Why is bowel screening important?

Bowel cancer is common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If found early, up to 90% of cases can be treated successfully.

Often bowel cancer has no obvious symptoms. Bowel screening can detect changes to the bowel long before a patient notices any problems.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have low participation rates in bowel screening and are more likely to have late stage cancer by the time they are diagnosed – when the cancer is much more difficult to treat successfully.¹

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP)

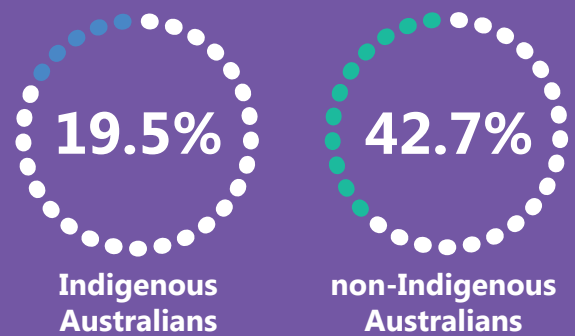
The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) provides a free bowel screening test for eligible people aged between 50 and 74.

Clinical guidelines recommend immunochemical faecal occult blood testing (iFOBT) every two years for most people between 50 and 74.²

The NBCSP mails free iFOBT kits to eligible people to complete in their own home. The test is designed to identify tiny traces of blood in the poo, which can be a sign of changes occurring in the bowel.

**BOWEL
SCREENING**
DON'T DELAY
do a bowel test today

Bowel screening participation



Only 1 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 to 74 take part in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program - less than half the rate of non-Indigenous Australians

Aust. Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018. National Bowel Cancer Screening Program: Monitoring report

This test can save lives, so spread the word

Patients are more likely to complete a bowel screening test if it is recommended by a trusted health professional.

Menzies School of Health Research carried out extensive consultations about bowel screening with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and found many would like their GP or health worker to raise the issue with them.³

By giving out the screening kits directly to your patients, you can explain why the test is important, and demonstrate how to collect the samples. And you can help break down the stigma around talking about topics like 'poo' and 'cancer'.

Social and cultural concerns

Some patients may be embarrassed talking about taking a sample of poo. Some may prefer to talk about bowel screening with a non-Indigenous doctor or nurse, because of the sensitivity of the subject. Others may want to talk with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health professional. As with other sensitive matters, men may wish to talk to a male health professional and women may prefer to talk to a female health professional.

What are the social and cultural issues around bowel screening in your community?

Talk with your co-workers and health centre management about the best way to organise and talk about bowel screening with your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.

Finding the right words

Some messages that have tested well for talking about bowel screening with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients include:

- Bowel cancer can develop without any symptoms. But if found early, it can usually be treated successfully.
- There is a simple test to help find bowel changes early.
- The test can find tiny amounts of blood in your poo, long before you would notice any changes.
- I've done the test myself.
- It's not shame, it's a part of life.
- If blood is found, it doesn't necessarily mean you have cancer. There can be other reasons why you might have blood in your poo and we would need to find out why.
- Some people think doing a bowel screening test is shameful or embarrassing. The real shame is if you don't do the test and then later, you're not around for your family.
- Don't delay, do a bowel test today.

More Information

For information about the NBCSP go to: www.cancerscreening.gov.au/bowel or call the Program Info Line: 1800 118 868
Free call (calls from mobiles may be charged)

Resources for encouraging bowel screening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients can be found at: www.indigenousbowelscreen.com.au



Australian Government

**NATIONAL
BOWELCANCER**
SCREENING PROGRAM



References

1. AIHW 2018. National Bowel Cancer Screening Program: monitoring report 2018. Cat. no. CAN 112. Canberra: AIHW.
2. Cancer Council Australia Colorectal Cancer Guidelines Working Party 2017. Clinical practice guidelines for the prevention, early detection and management of colorectal cancer. Sydney: Cancer Council Australia.
3. Menzies School of Health Research, 2016. Report to the Australian Government Department of Health, unpublished.

Original artwork by Jordan Lovegrove