

4 April 2018

Seniors Week - Bowel Screening Saves Lives

The Hawkesbury is a bowel cancer hot spot, according to recent data projections by Cancer Institute NSW, which found that this year the area will have the highest rate of bowel cancer in the Sydney region.

If found early, 90% of bowel cancers can be successfully treated. Yet, bowel cancer screening rates remain low when compared to other cancers, despite the introduction of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) which offers a free 'at home' screening kit to eligible Australians aged 50 - 74 years old.

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN), is working with healthcare providers, the community and other stakeholders to improve bowel cancer screening rates within the Hawkesbury and the greater Nepean Blue Mountains region.

Lizz Reay, CEO of Wentworth Healthcare said, "Improving cancer screening participation in our community is a key priority for us, as we know that early detection and diagnosis makes a huge difference to patient survival rates."

"In the Hawkesbury, we have been working closely with several general practices to increase their patients' bowel screening rates, with some promising results," she said.

"We have supported these practices by helping them set up systems and processes to better identify patients needing screening, and by encouraging GPs and patients to have open conversations about the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer, which can be embarrassing to talk about," said Ms Reay.

In the last 9 months, patient screening rates from practices working with NBMPHN have improved across both the never-screened and the under-screened patient groups. Never-screened eligible men improved by 3%, while women in the same group improved by 4%. Under-screened (or late screened) eligible men improved by 4% while women improved by 5%.

NBMPHN has also commissioned Men's Health Services to run a number of free "Get in Early" men's health education sessions in the Hawkesbury, between April and June, focusing on bowel cancer screening. Individuals and organisations can contact Greg Millan on 0417 772 390 or email greg@menshealthservices.com.au for more information or to book a free session for a group or workplace.

"This Seniors Week, we want the take-home message to be that cancer screening saves lives. While some people may find it embarrassing, bowel cancer is a topic that should be discussed with your doctor, especially when you are over 50 years of age," added Ms Reay.

Eligible Australians should receive their first free bowel screening Test Kit in the mail around their 50th Birthday. The Test Kits are easy to use and come with detailed instructions. To request a Test Kit to be mailed to you, call the NBCSP Information Line on 1800 118 868 or go to www.cancerscreening.gov.au/bowel

For interviews or further information contact:

Bess Bosman

Communications Officer

T 02 4708 8148

E Bess.Bosman@nbmphn.com.au

Nicole Parsons

Media & Communications Manager

T 02 4708 8191

M 0412 505 854

E Nicole.Parsons@nbmphn.com.au

The Nepean Blue Mountains PHN is a program run by
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Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith.

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