



Why Australians with bowel cancer need faster access to new medicines

Bowel cancer is one of the most common cancers in Australia. In 2020, it was estimated to be the 2nd leading cause of cancer deaths¹. Australians need faster access to treatment options for bowel cancer.

What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer generally refers to cancer of the colon and rectum and starts in the inner lining of the bowel. Depending on where the cancer starts, bowel cancer may also be called colon cancer or rectal cancer.²

Bowel cancer usually starts from growths called polyps, which can become cancer over time if they aren't treated.

Why is bowel cancer a big problem?

In 2020, about 15,000 people in Australia were estimated to be diagnosed with bowel cancer, which makes it the 4th most common cancer in the country.¹ It is estimated about 5,300 people in Australia died from bowel cancer that same year. Between 2012 to 2016, 7 in 10 people (70%) survived bowel cancer for 5 years or more after being diagnosed.¹

Cancer screening can find bowel cancer early. Like many cancers,

bowel cancer is easier to treat when it is found early. That is why bowel cancer is 1 of only 3 cancers with a recommended population-based screening program in Australia.³

But, about 2 in 10 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer at a later stage, when it is harder to treat and may have spread to other parts of the body (metastatic bowel cancer).⁴

How can biomarker testing help find and treat bowel cancer?

What are biomarkers?

Biomarkers are substances either made by cancer or by the body in response to a cancer. They can be found in blood, body fluids, or tissues.⁵ Knowing if a person has certain biomarkers can help doctors:



Know a person's chance (risk) of getting cancer



Diagnose different types of cancer



Make decisions about treatment⁵

Learn more about how to get a screening kit for bowel cancer:

About the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program
| Australian Government
Department of Health

[VIEW LINK](#)

How can biomarker testing help people with bowel cancer?

Knowing whether a person with bowel cancer has a certain biomarker, such as MSI-H/dMMR, (MSI-H = High levels of MicroSatellite Instability; dMMR = deficient Mismatch Repair); or KRAS/NRAS/BRAF, can help doctors find out how their cancer might grow and change. It can also help decide on treatment options.⁶

Research has shown that people with certain biomarkers may

respond to immuno-oncology treatments.⁷ Immuno-oncology treatments work with the body's immune system to fight cancer.

What treatment options are available for bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer can be treated in different ways including chemotherapy medicines, surgery, or radiotherapy.

However, these may not work for all patients.



Did you know?

Testing for biomarkers in bowel cancer is already common in Australia.⁸

More treatment options are needed for people with metastatic bowel cancer

Once the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, currently available treatments may not work for all patients.

Medicines are listed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) on the Australian Register

of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG) which means they can then be given to patients by their doctor. However, this is just the first step in the medicine review process. To ensure Australian patients get faster access to funded treatment options, additional treatments

must become available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) as soon as possible. The PBS is a government program that subsidises (pays some of the cost for) medicines to make them more affordable.

What are the benefits of getting new medicines on the PBS faster?

Improved patient well-being and quality of life

Delaying new medicines on the PBS affects the well-being of Australian patients and their families.

Improved economy

Getting medicines on the PBS faster helps the Australian economy to:

- Lower hospital costs
- Improve our overall economic productivity because people take less sick time away from work and spend less time in hospitals

Learn more

To learn more about bowel cancer, visit:

- What is bowel cancer? [VIEW LINK](#)
- Causes, symptoms and treatments [VIEW LINK](#)
- Treatments available on the PBS [VIEW LINK](#)

What can you do to help Australian bowel cancer patients?

Contact your Member of Parliament or the Federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, and request that new treatments for bowel cancer are added to the PBS as soon as possible. You can find out who your local member is by viewing this link. [VIEW LINK](#)

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1. AIHW <https://nccci.cancer australia.gov.au/diagnosis/cancer-incidence/cancer-incidence> Accessed 22.10.20 2. Cancer Council Australia Understanding Bowel Cancer 2019 <https://www.cancer.org.au/assets/pdf/understanding-bowel-cancer-booklet> Accessed 7.12.2020 3. Australian Government Department of Health Cancer <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/cancer> Accessed 26.04.21 4. AIHW Australian Cancer Database 2016 5. Cancer Biomarkers in Australia, Forward, Prof Ian Olver, Prof Doug Brooks, Prof Adrian Esterman, Sansom Institute for Health Research University of South Australia 2019 6. <https://www.ccalliance.org/colorectal-cancer-information/biomarkers> Accessed 06.05.21 7. Lee V, Murphy A, Le DT, Diaz LA Jr. Mismatch Repair Deficiency and Response to Immune Checkpoint Blockade. *Oncologist*. 2016 Oct;21(10):1200-1211. doi: 10.1634/theoncologist.2016-0046. Epub 2016 Jul 13. PMID: 27412392; PMCID: PMC5061538. 8. Lee V, Murphy A, Le DT, Diaz LA Jr. Mismatch Repair Deficiency and Response to Immune Checkpoint Blockade. *Oncologist*. 2016 Oct;21(10):1200-1211. doi: 10.1634/theoncologist.2016-0046. Epub 2016 Jul 13. PMID: 27412392; PMCID: PMC5061538.

