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MEDIA RELEASE

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Free bowel cancer tests will save lives

The Rudd Government will invest \$87.2 million over three years to screen all 50, 55 and 65-year-olds for bowel cancer – the second biggest cancer killer after lung cancer.

Up to 2.5 million people will be invited to take part in these free bowel cancer screening tests.

Early screening for bowel cancer has the potential to prevent as many as 2000 deaths every year.

Bowel cancer claims more than 80 Australian lives each week. Australia has one of the highest incidences of bowel cancer in the world.

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.

The tests will be offered to all Australians who turn 50, 55 or 65 years of age between 2008 and 2010. The program will begin on 1 July this year.

The program does not start and end with the tests. It includes funding for a national framework that includes workforce planning, training and support; and ensures quality assurance mechanisms are in place.

The Government will work with state and territory Governments through the Australian Health Care Agreements to ensure all necessary follow-up services are in place.

This commitment is an important step towards screening all people aged 50 years and above every two years.

The national initiative is a key weapon in the Government's fight against cancer.

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