



Preventive health – Cancer screening

The Australian Government is a world leader in cancer prevention and control, and will invest \$119.3 million in providing services that will improve the health outcomes and survival rates of Australians from a range of life-threatening cancers, including lung, breast, bowel and cervical cancer.

The Government spends over \$4 billion per year on cancer programs, screening, research and treatment. Through the 2021–22 Budget, the Australian Government will invest:

- \$67.6 million to support BreastScreen Australia program by directly inviting women aged 70 to 74 years to access free mammograms, aiding in the early detection of breast cancer. This complements BreastScreen Australia services already provided under the National Health Reform Agreement, targeting women 50 to 69
- \$6.9 million to engage with key stakeholders including states and territories, to further explore the feasibility of implementing a national lung cancer screening program
 - This includes consideration of the information, communications and technology requirements of a potential national program, and
 - Funding for cancer care nurses in 2021–22 for immediate support to people diagnosed with lung cancer.
- \$12 million to enhance the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR). This measure:
 - meets increased service operating costs arising from changes to the bowel and cervical programs
 - enhances the National Cancer Screening Register to integrate and share data with other Government health systems, and
 - will facilitate the direct distribution of bowel screening kits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care centres.

- \$32.8 million additional investment to support the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) to eliminate cervical cancer by 2035:
 - Funding arrangements for the NCSP will be changed to provide national consistency and improve cervical cancer outcomes by providing Medicare Benefits Schedule rebates to laboratories for processing cervical screening tests, targeted procurement to achieve cervical cancer elimination, and funding the Victorian Cytology Service to provide strategic technical advice to support the NCSP.

Why is this important?

Increasing cancer screening rates is essential to saving lives and reducing cancer burden across Australia.

Lung cancer is the fifth most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia and has low five-year survival rates, of around 18%. More than 42% of lung cancers are currently diagnosed at stage IV, which leads to high treatment costs of \$71,000 per patient (30 month average). This compares with just \$3,000 per person for treatment for stage I and II lung cancer. It is estimated that a targeted, risk-based screening program for lung cancer could save up to 12,000 lives over the first 10 years and improve the quality of life of up to 50,000 people.

The additional investment in the NCSR will also directly improve its integration with other health systems and strengthen links with key digital health platforms, such as My Health Record, and provider-based clinical information systems, which will improve health outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently have lower participation rates in cancer screening programs. Better targeting and tailoring these programs towards this important cohort will improve their screening rates and will help detect cancer earlier.

The Australian Government is committed to eliminating cervical cancer by 2035, which will require a strategic approach, with a focus on improving participation of under-screened women and reducing inequity in cervical cancer outcomes. This is of particular importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who as a group are under-screened and are more than three times more likely to die from cervical cancer than other Australian women.

Breast cancer will affect one in seven Australian women in their lifetime and it remains a leading cause of premature death among women. Since 2013–14, when the BreastScreen Australia program was expanded, inviting women aged 70 to 74 years to participate, an additional 200,000 women in this age group have accessed free mammograms, leading to more than 800 additional breast cancer diagnoses.

Who will benefit?

The continued investment in the BreastScreen Australia program will maintain participation rates in women aged 70 to 74 years, so that by 2024–25 over 300,000 women in this aged group are expected to participate in the program in each 2 year period.

Consultation, led by Cancer Australia, on the options for implementing a lung cancer screening program will include engagement with State and Territory governments, primary care providers and networks, public and private radiology providers, cancer diagnostic and treatment providers, specialist medical colleges, health networks, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. The process will also explore how existing systems and funding models could be leveraged to support lung cancer screening.

There are around 2.9 million current and past smokers who would benefit from a lung cancer screening program targeting high risk individuals aimed at men and women aged 55 to 74 years and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women aged 50 to 74 years.

Australians eligible for participation in the National Cervical Screening Program and the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program will benefit from investment in the NCSR and its increased integration into established health systems. It will also benefit clinicians by strengthening links with key digital health platforms such as My Health Record as well as their own clinical system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will benefit from cancer screening programs that are better targeted, localised and designed to be culturally appropriate. These dedicated resources will improve screening rates and help detect cancer earlier and materially contribute towards Target One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Australian women will benefit from cervical and breast cancer screening. Each year around 900 Australian women are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and 200 will die of the disease. Only one in every 2 eligible women access cervical screening through the NCSP. The ongoing support for screening will lead to earlier diagnosis and better health outcomes for thousands of Australian women.

How much will this cost?

The Australian Government is investing \$119.3 million over 4 years, from 2021-22.