



Preventive Health – Prioritising preventive health post-COVID

The Australian Government is investing \$55.7 million to support Australians to actively manage their health, and help reverse the decline in screening and early detection and treatment of cancer which occurred during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increase screening availability

Our Government is supporting a suite of measures to temporarily surge screening availability, including:

- \$5.9 million for rapid point of care cervical screening tests and follow-up in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to help overcome delays and remove the requirement for women to travel from country to follow-up
- \$9.7 million to the states and territories as a one-off boost to capacity for the BreastScreen program, enabling services to catch up on delayed appointments and re-engage women who stopped or were prevented from screening during the pandemic
- \$4.1 million to increase capacity for cervical screening self-collection by supporting nurse and other providers to distribute tests, and
- \$10.2 million for a colonoscopy triage nurse pilot to grow capacity to process those procedures delayed due to the pandemic.

Cervical cancer screening promotion

The Government will also allocate \$10.2 million for a campaign promoting to women the roll out of self-collected tests for cervical cancer, through the peak clinical bodies and cancer control organisations.

Accessing Health Campaign

Part of this initiative will also remind Australians to focus on their overall health with a new \$15 million communication campaign encouraging people to stay up to date with their health checks and to inform Australians about the availability of telehealth services, electronic prescriptions, and online mental health services.

Why is this important?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Australians have delayed vital cancer screening, routine health checks and diagnostic tests. During extended lockdowns and health system preparations for COVID-19 management, many screening services were closed and Australians avoided routine check-ups for fear of potential exposure to COVID-19. The delay in diagnoses and preventive care may have a significant economic and social impact on our health system and community well beyond the end of COVID-19.

Screening can detect conditions that have not yet become symptomatic, enabling earlier, more effective, and less invasive treatments. Regular visits to GPs for essential health checks are vital for appropriate referrals and timely intervention.

The campaign promoting the rollout of self-collected tests for cervical cancer will support the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030* to increase participation rate in cervical screening from 56% to 64% by 2025. Other measures such as collection points for bowel screening kits and BreastScreen mobile vans encourage Australians to participate in these programs.

Who will benefit?

These proactive health measures will encourage Australians to return to screening, temporarily increase the availability and access to cancer screening services to make up for COVID-19 related delays, and support timely detection and treatment of cancer. Screening can detect conditions that have not yet become symptomatic, enabling earlier, more effective, and less invasive treatments.

The boost to the capacity of BreastScreen will screen between 110,000 and 300,000 additional women for breast cancer through extended opening hours.

Priority populations, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people living in rural and remote communities, will be key beneficiaries of the targeted initiatives.

How much will this cost?

The Australian Government is investing \$55.7 million over four years from 2021–22 to 2024–25.