Determined to make a difference: Local champions join forces to fight Australia’s second-biggest cancer killer

What do two bowel cancer survivors, a retired pharmacist, a Greek community group leader and a librarian have in common?

They are raising their voices in the community with the aim of increasing Frankston’s rate of bowel screening which is the lowest in the state.

The community champions are working with the Cancer Council Victoria, South Eastern Melbourne PHN and Frankston City Council to spread the world about bowel screening.

Currently, only 32.2% of Frankston residents who receive an at-home bowel screening kit from the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (called the faecal occult blood test or FOBT) complete and return the kit.

While bowel cancer is the second-biggest cancer killer after lung cancer, it is curable in 90% of cases if detected early. The risk of the disease increases sharply from age 50.

The committed group are: Claude D’angiolillo, Lois Dennington, Diana Farmer, Roy Francis, Peter Harrison, Kate Johanson, Bron Mason, Peter Naughton, Kon Paliouras, Kay Pledger, Heime Sharp, Tamara Sharp.

Peter Harrison from the Positive Ageing Team at Frankston City Council hopes that the community champions will be key to the success of the program.

“There are so many health issues to worry about as you get older, but our hope is that by getting a group of passionate people from Frankston together, we can make a difference to improve Frankston’s bowel screening rates,” Mr Harrison said.

“Our champions have all been touched by bowel cancer in some way and are motivated to encourage their fellow Frankston residents to do this simple, free test”.

“They will spread the word among their friends, family, workmates and networks that doing the FOBT is important to protect your health because it can catch bowel cancer early, giving the best chance of a cure.”

Cancer Council Victoria Screening Manager Kate Brown said that most people should be doing the FOBT rather than having a colonoscopy to screen for bowel cancer.

“People who don’t have symptoms or a strong family history should be doing the FOBT, it’s a clean and simple process that only takes a few minutes to do that could save your life,” she said.

The project is part of a larger program that aims to increase the screening rates not only for bowel screening, but breast and cervical screening as well.

When do people receive FOBTs?

Under the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, the FOBT is sent to eligible Australians aged over 50 years.
This year, the program is inviting men and women turning 50, 55, 60, 64, 65, 70, 72 and 74 to screen for bowel cancer, but more ages will be added until 2020 when all Australians aged 50 to 74 are invited to screen every two years.

If you are not one of the ages currently covered by the national program, you can purchase an FOBT from Cancer Council Victoria online at cancervic.org.au/bowelttest or by calling the helpline on 13 11 20. FOBTs are also available through some GPs, pharmacies and health care funds.

**About the local project**

The South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (SEMPHN) and Cancer Council Victoria are working together to encourage more residents of the Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip and Stonnington to have regular cancer screening.

It aims to increase awareness of the breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening programs and make it easier for doctors to promote cancer screening. This includes improvements to patient reminders and recall which reminds patients to screen every two years and ensures that patients with abnormal test results return to the practice for follow-up.

The following cancer screening programs are recommended for asymptomatic people:
- **Bowel-** Every two years with a FOBT from ages 50 to 74.
- **Breast-** Every two years with a mammogram from ages 50 to 74.
- **Cervical-** Every two years with a Pap test from ages 18 to 69.

**Key statistics**

**Cancer screening participation rates in South Eastern Melbourne region:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>National Bowel Screen Program (2013-2014) one year participation rate</th>
<th>BreastScreen (2013-2014) two year participation rate</th>
<th>PapScreen (2012-2013) two year participation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bayside</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinia</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankston</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen Eira</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Dandenong</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mornington Peninsula</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Phillip</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonnington</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victorian average</strong></td>
<td><strong>37.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>54.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>60.4%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National average</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>58.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figures are below state averages](image)

![Among lowest 5 LGA’s in the state](image)

Source:
- Bowel – Data provided to CCV from the NBCSP, cited in CCV Seeing Red report: National Bowel Cancer Screening Program Participation report. October 2015;
- Breast – BreastScreen Victoria, 2015;

**Cancer incidence and mortality in South Eastern Melbourne region 2010-2014 is available upon request.**