

Bowel Screening Age Extension Event

Due to MO:	25 September 2025	Reference	HNZ00097932
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
From:	Matt Hannant, Acting National Director, National Public Health Service		
Copy to:	n/a		
Security level:	In Confidence	Priority	Routine
Consulted:	The Public Health Agency has been consulted on this event briefing		
Proactive Release:	This title is proposed by Health NZ for proactive release		

Contact for phone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Matt Hannant	Acting National Director, National Public Health Service		
Adeline Cumings	Head of Business Services, National Public Health Service		x

Attachments	
Appendix 1:	Runsheets and location map
Appendix 2:	Talking points and reactive lines
Appendix 3:	Biographies
Appendix 4:	Draft press release

Appendix 2 has been withheld in full.

About the event

Purpose	This event is for you to announce the start of the National Bowel Screening Programme (NBSP) age extension to 58 years old
Date	Sunday 5 October
Time	1.00pm-2.30pm
Venue	Marketing Impact, 89 Hugo Johnson Drive, Penrose, Auckland
Expected attendees	Alan Hard (CEO, Marketing Impact) Amy Hills (Manager of the mailhouse, Marketing Impact) Marty Evitt-Aitken (Production Director, Marketing Impact) [Note: biographies are attached as Appendix 3]
Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora representatives	Dr Nick Chamberlain (National Director, National Public Health Service) <i>(TBC – will be confirmed on 29 September)</i> Dr Susan Parry (Clinical Lead, National Bowel Screening Programme) Alana Ewe-Snow (Director Prevention-Screening, National Public Health Service) Cathy Whiteside (Programme Manager, National Bowel Screening Programme) Koula Kutu (Principal Advisor, Business Services, National Public Health Service) Approximately 10 members of the NBSP national and Auckland region teams.
Ministry of Health	Andrew Old (Deputy Director-General, Public Health Agency) <i>TBC</i>
Media	Media will be invited and will be managed by Sophie Lowery – Media Lead, Health New Zealand, [REDACTED]

Background

1. This event briefing provides you with information to support your announcement about the lowering of the free bowel screening starting age to 58 years old. This will begin to be implemented in the Northern region and South Island from 6 October 2025. The new bowel screening age range in those regions will be 58 to 74 years old.
2. The run sheet and location map is provided in Appendix 1.

Marketing Impact is hosting the event

3. Marketing Impact is a mailhouse based in Auckland. It collates and dispenses bowel

screening kits for the National Bowel Screening Programme (NBSP).

4. As part of the event, you will be taken through the end-to-end process for the distribution of bowel screening kits, including the printing, compiling and send-out of packs. Media will be able to film parts of the process, and there will also be sample kits available for attendees to inspect.
5. Health New Zealand (Health NZ) is making enquiries to arrange for a bowel cancer survivor, whose cancer was detected through the programme, to be present and available to speak with media. There will also be an opportunity for you to speak to the survivor during the event. Your Office will be provided with details once this is confirmed.

About the NBSP

6. New Zealand has one of the highest rates of bowel cancer globally. More than 3,300 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer annually in New Zealand and more than 1,200 people die from it.
7. Currently approximately 800,000 people are eligible for bowel screening annually. As of February 2025, the participation rate for the NBSP was 57.8%, with a participation target of 60%. Participation rates differ by ethnicity as follows:
 - Māori: 51.5%
 - Pacific peoples: 39.1%
 - Asian populations: 44.2%
 - Other: 62.4%
8. Māori, Pacific peoples and Asian populations experience the lowest coverage rates in the NBSP, and targeted funding is focused on increasing their participation.
9. Between 1 July 2017 and 22 September 2025, the NBSP delivered the following services:
 - 2,536,949 kits have been sent
 - 1,436,881 kits have been returned
 - 52,966 positive results
 - 42,516 colonoscopies (6978 screening colonoscopies have been delivered in the last 12 months ending July 2025)
 - 2,991 cancers detected
10. Since the beginning of the programme in July 2017 at least 40% of detected cancers have been detected at an early stage, when they can often be successfully treated.
11. Bowel screening has also led to the identification and removal of thousands of polyps (growths in the bowel) which, if left untreated, can become cancerous over time.

Bowel screening age range extension

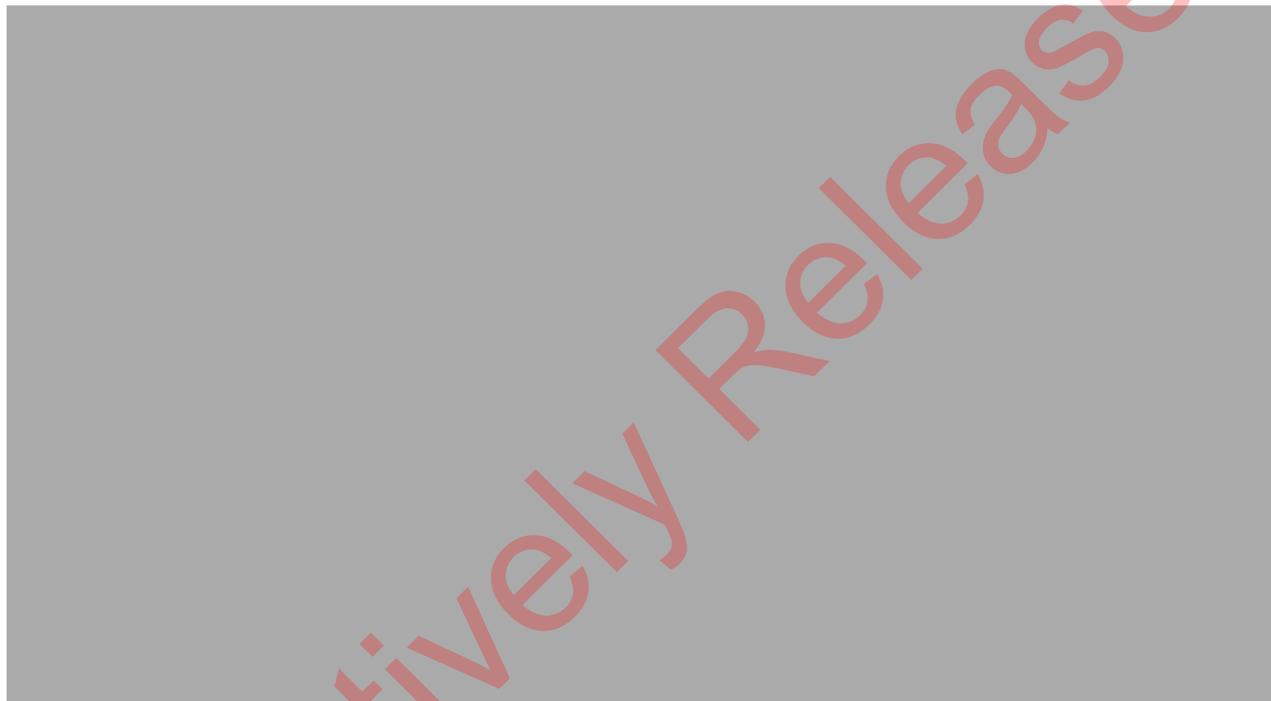
Repurposing funding

12. In March 2025, Cabinet agreed to redirect \$36 million to lowering the eligible starting age for bowel screening for all New Zealanders from 60 to 58 years old, as part of the NBSP. This included funding of \$19.3 million for initiatives to improve screening participation

among groups with low screening rates (such as Māori, Asian and Pacific peoples).

Benefits of lowering the bowel screening starting age to 58 years old

13. It is estimated that lowering the bowel screening starting age to 58 years old will prevent an additional 771¹ bowel cancers and 566 bowel cancer deaths over the next 25 years. Lowering the eligibility age will see at least 122,000 more people eligible for screening in the first year than is the case with the current 60 to 74 age range.
14. The move to lower the starting age brings New Zealand closer to eligibility ranges in comparable countries, such as Australia, the UK and the Netherlands. The Government has committed to further lowering the age as workforce and resourcing allows.



Participation initiatives

Initiatives to improve participation for populations with lower screening rates

19. The announcement in March 2025 also included \$19.3 million funding towards initiatives to improve access for population groups with lower screening rates. These are described further in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Initiatives to improve participation for populations with lower screening rates

Initiative	Description
Engagement approaches for populations with low	Co-designed local pre-reach and engagement approaches to reach populations with low screening rates. This may be a text, phone or face-to-face engagement with high-needs participants prior to them

¹ This assumes a 60% level of participation in the NBSP.

screening rates	receiving a screening invite. Timeframe: From October 2025.
National implementation of a laboratory based drop off option for test kits	This will enable bowel screening kits to be returned and dropped off at community laboratories as an alternative to postal return, which is more culturally acceptable for some. Participants are informed of community laboratory locations for kit drop off. Timeframe: From October 2025.
Availability of barcoded kits	This will enable kits to be given directly to high needs groups in selected settings such as GP appointments, outreach and events. Timeframe: May-June 2026
Kaimahi education module	A web-based education module to upskill community and district kaimahi in the NBSP and help inform conversations when engaging with communities about bowel screening. Timeframe: October 2025
May - bowel screening primary care promotion	A primary care promotion held every May that supports general practices across the country to promote opportunistic conversations about bowel screening with patients from high-need communities. Over 400 general practices took part in 2025, and the promotion will be repeated in May 2026. Timeframe: May 2026
Updating and running the national bowel screening multimedia campaign	Updating the existing national multimedia campaign to promote the NBSP and the change in the eligibility age, including television commercial, videos on how to do the test, radio and social media. Updating bowel screening collateral with the new age range, including brochures, banners, posters and flyers. Timeframe: From October 2025 to end June 2026

Next steps

20. Health NZ will engage with your office on future opportunities and announcements signalled for 2025/26 related to the NBSP.

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Appendix 1: Runsheet and location map

Time	Details	Minister's Office notes
1.00pm	Minister Brown arrives at the venue. He will be met by Dr Nick Chamberlain (tbc), Alana Ewe-Snow, Dr Susan Parry and Amy Hills Koula Kutu, Principal Advisor, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	
1.05pm - 1.30pm	The Minister will be given a tour of the mailhouse by Amy Hills, with Dr Nick Chamberlain (tbc), Alana Ewe-Snow and Dr Susan Parry attending alongside.	
1.30pm	Minister's stand-up and media interview opportunities alongside Dr Nick Chamberlain and Dr Susan Parry and potentially a NBSP survivor who had cancer detected as part of the screening programme.	
2.00pm	Afternoon tea for attendees	
2.15pm	The Minister departs	
2.30pm	Event concludes	

Location map of carpark for Minister's vehicle

Marketing Impact, 79 Hugo Johnston Drive, Penrose, Auckland



Appendix 3: Biographies

The following attendees from Marketing Impact will be in attendance.



Alan Hard (CEO Marketing Impact)

Alan Hard is the CEO and Chair of Marketing Impact where he has served for 34 years. Marketing Impact is the logistics team behind bowel screening programme communications – a function they have performed for the NBSP for nearly 8 years. They also support Health NZ across a variety of communications and logistics requirements.



Amy Hills (General Manager, Marketing Impact)

Amy is the General Manager of Marketing Impact and over sees operations, client strategy, and the integration of data-driven marketing into communication solutions. Passionate about operational excellence and innovation, Amy focuses on streamlining workflows, enhancing customer experiences, and delivering campaigns that resonate with the right audience, at the right time, via the right channel.



Marty Evitt-Aitken (Production Director, Marketing Impact)

Marty is the Production Director at Marketing Impact, where he has contributed for over 12 years. In his role, he works closely with the Data and Production teams to drive day-to-day operations and is also the operational lead for the NBSP, ensuring the effective delivery of this critical service.

Appendix 4: Draft Press Release

The bowel screening starting age for people in Northland, Auckland and the South Island will be lowered from 60 to 58 years old from tomorrow (6 October). People turning 58, 59 or 60 years old will receive a bowel screening kit at around the time of their next birthday. The change will be in place nationwide from March 2026, when the lower age is introduced in the Central and Midland regions of the North Island.

Minister of Health Simeon Brown says lowering the starting age to 58 years old means about 122,000 additional people will be eligible for free bowel screening, saving lives.

“Our modelling estimates that about 771 additional bowel cancers and 566 additional deaths will be prevented over 25 years nationally, compared to the previous 60 to 74 age range.

“People turning 58, 59 or 60 will be mailed a bowel screening kit around their next birthday or contacted by a local health provider,” Minister Brown says.

“Everyone who is 58 or 59 years of age when the age range extension is introduced in their region will be invited within a year. This means all newly eligible people throughout the country will have been invited for free bowel screening by the end of March 2027.”

Once people start the programme, a free bowel screening test kit is provided to them every two years, usually mailed to their home. The test is simple to do and can help find bowel cancer early, when it can often be successfully treated. Further investigation can also find polyps, which will generally be removed to help prevent cancer.

Minister Brown says that since the beginning of the national bowel screening programme in July 2017, more than 2.53 million home test kits have been sent out and nearly 3000 cancers have been detected.

“At least 40% of these cancers were detected at an early stage, when they can often be successfully treated.”

Anyone who has bowel symptoms they are worried about should see their doctor straight away and not wait for a bowel screening kit.

For further information see the Time to Screen website, call 0800 924 432, or talk to your doctor.