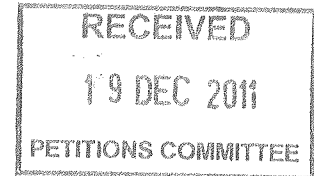




**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING**

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 19 September 2011 providing me with a copy of the petition concerning full implementation of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (the Program) that was presented by you to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions on 19 September 2011.

The Gillard Government recognises that bowel cancer is a major health issue affecting many Australians and is committed, in partnership with state and territory governments, to developing a program which is accessible, comprehensive and ultimately reduces the incidence of the disease.

Early detection by screening remains the best way to fight bowel cancer. That is why in the 2011 Budget, the Australian Government announced funding of \$138.7 million over four years to continue the Program as well as providing funding on an ongoing basis. This provides surety for the operation of the Program into the future.

Since the commencement of phase one of the Program in August 2006, over 3 million Australians have received a free bowel cancer screening test kit and over 1.2 million people have returned the test for analysis. Over 2,000 people who returned a test kit have been diagnosed with suspected or confirmed bowel cancer and at least 3,000 people were diagnosed with earlier stage adenomas.

As the terms of the petition correctly state, current evidence from the National Health and Medical Research Council's Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Prevention, Early Detection and Management of Colorectal Cancer recommends that organised screening commence for average risk people at 50 years of age. Over the next four years, approximately 3.7 million people turning 50, 55 and 65 years of age between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2014 will be offered free bowel cancer screening under the continuation of this Program. However, the Program needs to be phased in gradually to ensure that health services, such as colonoscopy and treatment services, are able to meet any increased demand.

The Government will consider further whether to expand the Program once fiscal circumstances permit.

I appreciate your interest in the Program and trust that the above information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

NICOLA ROXON

1 DEC 2011