



MEDIA RELEASE

Positive outcomes from Gippsland cancer screening project

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Gippsland general practices who took part in a Maximising Cancer Screening project say they will embed opportunistic screening as part of routine medical check-ups.

Gippsland Primary Health Network partnered with 20 local general practices across the region in an effort to boost screening rates for bowel, breast and cervical cancer, and testing for hepatitis B and C.

Gippsland PHN Acting Chief Executive Officer, Angela Jacob, said the project results were “very positive” with 732 patients screened.

“The decrease in screening during the COVID pandemic has significant public health implications for vulnerable population groups and the general community,” Mrs Jacob said. “This project has helped raise the importance of cancer screening.”

Dr Sonya Moncrieff from Mirboo North Medical Centre said the project had a beneficial impact on patients’ health. “The flow-on effect was being able to run a more efficient practice,” she said. “I am so pleased to have participated in the roll-out of the project, and in bowel and breast screening in my clinic.”

Dr Lisa Gilbert from Project Health in Traralgon said the project was “a fantastic opportunity to review and update patient records then initiate recalls for those whose cancer screening may have been missed”.

“We saw an immediate increase in those returning for cancer screening, especially those women who were due for cervical screening,” she said.

The three-month project was funded by the Victorian Department of Health and supported by peak cancer organisations after a University of Melbourne report showed a 30 per cent reduction in cancer notifications since COVID-19 restrictions were first applied in Victoria in 2020.

Over the project’s three-month trial period in early 2023, practices chose one of the focal cancer screening types and were supported by Gippsland PHN to embed screening activities. These activities included extracting clinic data to identify patients who were under screened or had never been screened.

Practices will now follow up the patients who were identified as overdue for cancer screening and those who had never screened before. Cancer screening will also be embedded in routine patient check-ups.

Mrs Jacob said general practice was central to increasing cancer screening participation rates. “Research has found the use of GP-endorsed letters, recall and reminder systems, and improved clinical information systems are key drivers to increasing the number of people undertaking cancer screening,” she said.

“Finding cancer at an early stage increases the chances of successful treatment and improved survival.”

The project is now undergoing evaluation by the University of Melbourne.

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For more information, contact Lynne Smith on 0437 918 234 or lynne.smith@gphn.org.au