

## A Bowel Cancer Screening Programme for New Zealand

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### Purpose

1. This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to the implementation of a bowel cancer screening pilot.
2. The proposed pilot will begin in October 2011, run for four years, and cost up to \$31.6 million in time-limited funding. The Minister of Health intends to fund the pilot from the Budget 2010 Vote Health package.
3. At the completion of the pilot, Ministers will be given the option to roll out a national bowel cancer screening programme, which is indicatively estimated to cost between \$24 million to \$53 million per annum, with additional funding of up to \$7.9 million per annum required for an IT system to support the programme (these figures do not include the flow on costs resulting from increased volumes of diagnostics and treatment). Funding for a national programme, if required, will be sought in Budget 2013 or 2014.

### Comment

4. Previous New Zealand and international evidence suggests that the benefits of a screening programme may be modest, the costs significant, and that there is 'small but real' potential for harm.
5. The Ministry of Health does not hold enough information to enable the preparation of a comprehensive Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA), which is necessary to inform the decision to implement a screening programme in New Zealand. In particular, more information is needed in the New Zealand context in relation to the efficacy of the test, evidence of mortality reduction, the capacity for colonoscopies and treatment, the prevalence of false positive and negative results and consequential unnecessary colonoscopies, the potential harm directly or indirectly resulting from the programme and participation rates at each stage of the patient journey.
6. Further information is also required to inform an options analysis of the marginal benefits of screening different target groups/ages and the additional benefit that the programme is likely to result in, compared with current systems, which target high risk patients only. The decision as to which groups/ages to target will have a major impact on the cost effectiveness of the programme.
7. The Colorectal Cancer Screening Advisory Group noted in their 2005 report that "a feasibility study is an essential pre-requisite to a decision regarding a pilot study particularly in relationship to the provision of colonoscopy, given the current capacity constraints in New Zealand".
8. Treasury is of the view that a feasibility study would be a logical pre-cursor to the implementation of pilot, as a feasibility study is likely to be a more cost effective way to obtain the required information, and is less likely to raise public expectations.

9. However, the Ministry of Health is of the view that the implementation of a pilot of the size and duration proposed is the minimum that is required in order to obtain the information needed.
10. Treasury is concerned that the pilot will raise patient and sector expectations and that it will be difficult for Ministers not to roll out a national programme at its completion, even if the evidence suggests it is likely to be poor value for money, or even harmful. Therefore, the pilot should be viewed and communicated primarily as a way in which to gather information on the costs and benefits of bowel cancer screening in order to determine whether or not to roll out a national programme.

### Treasury Recommendation

11. We recommend that you ask the Minister of Health whether the proposed pilot is the minimum that is required in order to obtain the information needed to inform a CBA, or if the pilot could be scaled.
12. We recommend that you seek assurance from the Minister of Health that in his media release he will communicate the pilot as an information gathering exercise and not as the first stage in the roll out of a national programme.
13. We recommend you **support** the recommendations in this paper.

*The following table goes into the Executive Summary of the paper*

Title	Pg	Recommend	Fiscal Implications (\$m GST excl.)					Treasury Comment
			09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	Out years	
A Bowel Cancer Screening Programme for New Zealand		<p><b>Ask</b> the Minister of Health whether the pilot is the minimum required to gather the information needed</p> <p><b>Seek</b> assurance from the Minister of Health that he will communicate the pilot as an information gathering exercise</p> <p><b>Support</b> the paper</p>	<i>Operating</i>					This paper seeks agreement to the implementation of a bowel cancer screening programme pilot. The pilot will run for four years and will be funded from time-limited funding from the Budget 2010 Vote Health package.
			-	31.6	31.6	31.6	31.6	
			<i>Capital</i>					
			-	-	-	-	-	