What is bowel cancer?
Bowel cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the wall of the large bowel, often starting as polyps. Bowel cancer is one of Australia’s most common cancers, and is the second biggest cancer killer in Australia after lung cancer.

What is bowel cancer screening and why is it important?
Screening using an immunochemical Faecal Occult Blood Test (iFOBT) helps find bowel cancer in its earlier stages when there are often no symptoms, thereby reducing deaths from this disease. It can also prevent bowel cancer as polyps are removed before they turn into cancer.

Who should screen?
50 – 74 year olds with no personal bowel cancer or bowel disease history, no family history, and no symptoms should complete a iFOBT every two years. Those with family history and/or symptoms should see a GP.

How can patients screen for bowel cancer?
The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) sends out free iFOBTs to eligible Australians aged 50-74 using Medicare and Department of Veterans’ Affairs information. The iFOBT looks for hidden blood in faeces which could be an early sign of bowel cancer.

Who receives a free iFOBT?
In 2017: 50, 54, 55, 58, 60, 64, 68, 70, 72, 74 year olds
In 2018: 50, 54, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74 year olds
2019 and onwards: 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74
Visit www.cancerscreening.gov.au/eligibility to check when your patient will receive an invitation.
Identify patients that are 49-74 years old

Does the patient have any of the following:
- Bowel disease or cancer
- Symptoms of bowel cancer
- Family history of bowel cancer

The patient should discuss this with their GP if any of the above.

Screened in the last two years?

NO
50-74 years old
Ask the patient if they are ok to talk about cancer screening and reassure them why you need to ask. Inform patient when they are eligible for a iFOBT kit.
“Your kit should arrive within six months of your birthday”
“Screening can help find cell changes before they turn into cancer”
“The test is very easy to do, here are the steps” (use instructional images to describe)

NO
49 years old (never invited)
Arrange to send a letter to the patient encouraging their participation.
“Your kit should within six months of your 50th birthday”

YES
Had a positive result
This patient is best managed by their GP and/or specialist. If necessary, flag for the GP to assess if they are due for a colonoscopy.
Only if they have not been assessed by a GP following a positive FOBT result:
“A positive result does not mean you have cancer”
“It is very important to discuss what further tests you may need with the GP”

YES
Had a negative result
“Make sure you do the test again when you next receive it”
“Because your risk of bowel cancer increases with age, you need to repeat the test every two years”
“Bowel cancer doesn’t just happen to unhealthy people or those with a family history”

Patient: The use of the term patient is used throughout this guide to describe the person accessing care.