

NATIONAL BOWELCANCER SCREENING PROGRAM



Sharon shares how bowel cancer affected her family

Sharon Wallace is an Aboriginal woman who experienced firsthand the devastating effects cancer has on a family when her father died from bowel cancer.

Sharon's experience has reinforced for her how precious life is and how important it is to take the screening test for bowel cancer.

"Bowel cancer screening is very important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The bowel screening tests are sent in the mail when people turn 50. So it's important for people when they receive the test, to do it."

Sharon is a workforce policy officer with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) – the peak body for Aboriginal community controlled health services in the Northern Territory. She says that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers are there to empower people to take control of their own health, and can play an important role in helping people to feel comfortable about completing the bowel screening test.

"We're in a perfect position as health care workers as the first point of contact – we understand the language, our culture – we can help our people feel safe and secure and explain to them the steps of doing the screening so that people don't have so much fear".

She also emphasises the important role family members can play in encouraging their elders to complete the bowel screening test.

"Our families play a big role in caring for each other and our community. So it's important that if you have a family member or loved one that's reached 50 years of age, or older, to ask them if they've done the test".

It was late 2013 when Sharon noticed her dad was tired a lot, wasn't eating much, and didn't want to leave the house – even when they went fishing he'd prefer to stay at home. He seemed a little disorientated and was spending a lot of time in the bathroom. After her dad hadn't eaten for a week, Sharon took him to the hospital. They discovered that he had bowel cancer. This was shattering news for Sharon, her dad, and the rest of the family.

"It was hard for my dad to cope. He was worried about his children and grandchildren, he tried to give everyone hope," Sharon explains.

After Sharon's dad passed away, the family was left in grief, and the time that followed was very difficult. This experience led Sharon to become an advocate of bowel cancer screening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"We want our old people to get old, we want them to see their grandchildren and great grandchildren grow up and we don't want them to be leaving us before their time. Don't just throw the screening kit in the bin like my Dad did. If he would've done that test things might have been different."

To find out when your next kit will arrive in the mail, visit cancerscreening.gov.au



Australian Government
Department of Health

To find out more about bowel cancer and the screening program, visit: cancerscreening.gov.au
or call 1800 11 88 68