

Theresa May MP
10 Downing St
London SW1A 2AA



Date: 29.09.2016

Dear Prime Minister,

Re. Improving uptake of the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

We are writing to wish you a happy 60th birthday and to remind you that you are now eligible to participate in the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. The BCSP is aimed at individuals aged 60-74. Eligible participants, like you, are sent a home testing kit in the post every two years. Bowel cancer screening can both prevent and detect bowel cancer early so it is crucial that you and everyone who receives a kit uses and returns it.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the BCSP. Since the Programme began, over 25,000 cases of bowel cancer have been detected in England and more than 81,000 advanced adenomas. Those who are diagnosed through screening have a much a higher chance of survival - nearly everyone diagnosed through screening survives, as it is the most effective method of detecting bowel cancer early when it is more treatable.

Unfortunately despite the proven benefits of screening, uptake of the BCSP is still too low. In many areas of England uptake falls well short of the 56% national average, in some cases it is as low as 33%. The Clinical Commissioning Group area for your own constituency has an uptake rate of 55%. We know that uptake is worse among deprived and ethnic minority communities. For example, in deprived areas such as Tower Hamlets, uptake is as low as 39% while uptake in more affluent areas, such as Rushcliffe, is 67%. More can and should be done to reduce this inequality and improve uptake rate so everyone can benefit from screening.

While we welcome the Government commitment to replace the current screening test with the more accurate and easier to complete faecal immunochemical test (FIT), this is not due to be introduced for another 18 months. During this time thousands of people will miss out on the chance to detect bowel cancer early when it is easier to treat because participation rates are so low.

As Prime Minister, we urge you to set an example and lead the way in encouraging the eligible population in your constituency and country to take up the screening test. By doing this you will be helping to save lives from a disease that is responsible for 16,200 deaths each year. Please help us by publicly speaking about your experience of taking the test and the importance of participating in the programme.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Deborah Alsina in black ink.

Deborah Alsina MBE
CEO, Bowel Cancer UK

Handwritten signature of Mark Flanagan in blue ink.

Mark Flanagan
CEO, Beating Bowel Cancer