



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref WQs 82808 & 82809

Janet Finch Saunders MS
Senedd Member for Aberconwy

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20 July 2021

Dear Janet

Thank you for your recent Written Questions asking what steps I am taking to enable people aged 75 or over to access free bowel cancer screening every two years and steps being taken to enable free bowel cancer screening to start at the age of 50.

The Welsh Government follows the independent, expert advice of the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC) which currently recommends routine bowel screening for men and women aged between 50 and 74. Bowel Screening Wales currently sends a screening kit to men and women aged 60 to 74 every two years.

In line with UKNSC advice, a phased age expansion of the programme to include men and women aged 50 to 59 will commence from autumn 2021, followed by an increase in the test sensitivity. This optimisation of the programme is expected to be completed by 2024-25.

The Chair of the Wales Screening Committee wrote to the UKNSC in December 2019 to ask the committee to clarify its position on bowel screening in people outside of the recommended age range. The UKNSC has confirmed that its position is that it recommends that bowel cancer screening should be offered using faecal immunochemical testing (FIT) every two years to men and women aged 50 to 74 years of age and that there is insufficient evidence to recommend extending the age range. However, the UKNSC also indicated it would be supportive of the Welsh Government in any future consideration of the provision of bowel screening self-referral to men and women over the age of 74 in Wales.

As bowel screening for people over 74 years of age is not currently recommended, we will review the potential value of offering bowel screening self-referral to people over 74 years of age once the programme is optimised in line with the current UKNSC recommendation.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Population screening is not without risks so there needs to be a balance between the benefits and harms of the screening test being offered. It is essential we endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for patients with fewer unnecessary procedures and avoidable complications. We will, therefore, be focussing our resources on providing screening to those in the recommended age range, increasing the test sensitivity and increasing uptake in the recommended age cohort. This will make the biggest difference to reducing rates of death from bowel cancer and improving length of survival.

People outside the recommended age ranges for screening can still access care and should speak to their GP if they are concerned about their risk of cancer or have any symptoms of cancer.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services