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A cancer diagnosis has the power to significantly alter and potentially limit a person's life. However, by shifting some of Australia's cancer screening programs from a population-based to a risk-based or personalised approach, there is a strong potential for enhanced early detection and improved patient outcomes. In this context, primary care plays a vital and essential role.

Released today by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association's (AHHA) Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research, the Perspectives Brief '[Risk based cancer screening: the role of primary care](#)', is authored by researchers from the Primary Care Collaborative Cancer Clinical Trials Group (PC4).

In 2022, Australia witnessed bowel cancer as the second most common cause of cancer-related death, while breast cancer stood as the second most diagnosed cancer. Early detection has proven to be pivotal for both these forms of cancer, but participation rates in the national bowel and breast cancer screening programs remain low.

'Currently, only 40.9% of eligible Australians participate in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, and only 48% of eligible women participate in BreastScreen Australia,' says AHHA Chief Executive Kylie Woolcock.

'While these screening programs are vital, they rely on a population-based approach that primarily considers age brackets and does not specifically target individuals at higher risk of developing breast and bowel cancer.'

This new Deeble Perspectives Brief explores the recommendation of implementing of a risk-stratified screening approach for breast and bowel cancer, and primary care's role in early detection.

'Primary care holds a pivotal role in identifying patients at higher risk, utilising risk stratification that encompasses factors such as genetic risk, family history, and lifestyle factors. Equally important is the role of primary care in encouraging patient acceptability towards reduced screening for low-risk individuals, and healthcare professionals should receive adequate support to develop proficiency in these areas.'

'We can also help to empower patients to self-identify risk through the use of web-based risk assessment tools. This will also help improve risk communication for patients and can provide consistent advice, individual risk estimates and tailored management guidelines.'

'In order for national risk-based breast and bowel cancer screening programs to succeed, collaboration between healthcare providers and policymakers is vital to ensure the programs are acceptable for patients and healthcare professionals, equitably accessible, cost-effective and feasible.'

'This Brief recommends the development of a national roadmap for bowel cancer risk-based screening, establishing national cancer risk literacy training programs as well as funding model reforms that allow for increased cost sharing between primary care providers and specialists.'

The online version of this [media release](#) and the Perspectives Brief '[Risk based cancer screening: the role of primary care](#)' can be found on the AHHA website. **The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high-quality healthcare in Australia.**

Media enquiries: Kylie Woolcock, Chief Executive, AHHA, 0410 625 830