

Bowel screening awareness campaign

Scotland

April–May 2026



In partnership with



Campaign overview

Supported by NHS Scotland, Cancer Research UK is launching a nationwide campaign in Scotland which aims to increase informed intention to take part in bowel screening.

Why are we focusing on screening in Scotland?

Bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer in Scotland, with around 4,200 new cases every year – that's 11 every day [1].

Around half (48.9%) of bowel cancer cases with a known stage were diagnosed early (stages 1 and 2) in 2023 [2].



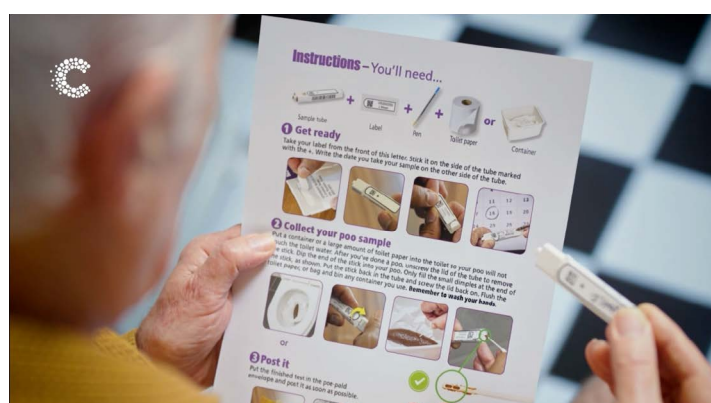
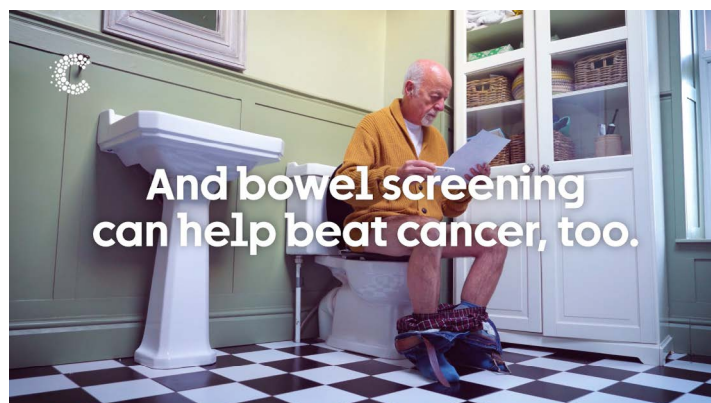
48.9% diagnosed at stages 1 and 2

Bowel screening is an important way to help prevent bowel cancer or find it at an early stage, when treatment is more likely to be successful. Yet the latest data from Public Health Scotland shows around a third of people (34%) invited for bowel screening don't take part [3].

Our campaign seeks to increase informed intention to participate in bowel screening by highlighting the potential benefits of bowel screening and by addressing commonly cited barriers to participation such as concerns about the practicalities of the test or a misconception that the test is for people with symptoms of bowel cancer [4].

What are we doing and when?

Our multi-channel campaign will run 7 April–18 May 2026. It will feature on TV, radio, out-of-home advertising, press, social media and owned channels.



Stills from TV advert

People from areas of higher deprivation or with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience barriers to taking part in bowel screening and are less likely to participate [5]. As part of our Cancer Awareness Roadshow and Cancer Awareness in the Workplace programmes, our nurses will engage with the public to increase awareness of Scotland's bowel screening programme, signpost people to appropriate support and emphasise the importance of early diagnosis. Activation sites have been selected based on identified areas of need and address inequalities that exist in screening uptake.

Who is the campaign aimed at?

The campaign will target people in Scotland aged 45–49 who are approaching eligibility for bowel screening, as well as people aged 50–74 who are currently eligible. Data shows that bowel screening uptake is lower among men and those in the 50–59 age bracket [4] and so we have sought to particularly appeal to this audience with the creative.



What are the key messages of the campaign?



Bowel screening saves lives.



Bowel screening can detect cancer at an early stage, when treatment is more likely to be successful, and can even prevent it from developing in the first place.



When you receive your screening invite, don't ignore it.



It's quick and easy to complete the kit.



Screening is for people with no symptoms.

How will we evaluate the campaign?

The campaign will be measured using a mixed-methods approach. This will include pre- and post-quantitative surveys and post-campaign qualitative interviews, as well as media results from channel-specific reports. We also plan to monitor operational screening uptake data where available.

Where are we directing the public?

We'll be signposting people to cruk.org/bowelscreeningscotland for more information.

This webpage includes localised content on bowel screening in Scotland and is designed to help break down barriers to screening and support informed participation. We'll also provide bowel screening information leaflets and posters in Cancer Research UK shops across Scotland.

How will we support health professionals?

Ahead of the campaign launch, we're sending tailored campaign briefing guides to over 800 GP practices across Scotland as well as digital packs to Community Pharmacy Scotland. The briefings include guidance and resources that help health professionals support people in accessing bowel screening and making an informed choice about taking part. We'll also promote the resources to health professionals via digital display ads, e-newsletters and social media.

On 31 March 2026, we'll be hosting a bowel screening webinar for GPs across Scotland. This will provide an overview of the campaign and the bowel screening programme in Scotland, plus the role of primary care in addressing inequalities in uptake.

References

- 1 Cancer Research UK. Bowel cancer incidence statistics (ICD10 C18–C20) in Scotland for 2018–2019 and 2021. Calculated by the Cancer Intelligence team. Similar data available at cruk.org/cancerstats
- 2 Data provided on request by Public Health Scotland, 2013–2023.
- 3 Public Health Scotland. Scottish bowel screening programme statistics May 2022–April 2024. Accessed December 2025.
- 4 Whitelock, V., (2024). Cancer Research UK's 2024 Cancer Awareness Measure 'Plus' (CAM+).
- 5 Public Health Scotland. Scottish bowel screening programme statistics. Accessed August 2025.

