

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Bowel cancer experience prompts mum to speak out**

Toowoomba resident Ingrid Van der Woude didn't think she would be at risk of bowel cancer.

With no family history and being fit and healthy, it wasn't something she thought about, but a routine health check changed that in an instant.

Ms Van der Woude was 46 years old when she was found to have low iron which resulted in further tests. A subsequent colonoscopy uncovered a three-centimetre tumour in a part of her large intestine known as the sigmoid colon.

Six months after surgery to remove the tumour, the cancer reappeared and Ms Van der Woude underwent chemotherapy. She now lives with the uncertainty that comes with a terminal diagnosis.

"Once it spreads, colorectal cancer tends to reoccur," Ms Van der Woude said.

"It's the shock of the diagnosis and the uncertainty that is so difficult to live with."

Ms Van der Woude hopes by sharing her story, other people will pay more attention to their health and any signs or symptoms experienced.

"I would like to see people who are in their 40s use their birthdays as a reminder to have an annual check-up. Get your blood tests, vital signs checked, be aware of your body and get to your doctor if there are any changes," she said.

As a healthy, active woman, Ms Van der Woude's bowel cancer diagnosis shocked her husband and three adult children, as well as her extended family members and friends.

"I had no family history and other no risk factors," she said.

"I didn't have any obvious symptoms that were enough to complain about, but in hindsight, I realise I was more tired than usual and I would occasionally feel a bit bloated.

"There is now, what we refer to as our 'pre- and post-cancer' lives.

"Life hasn't been the same since, everything changed in that instant after my colonoscopy when the nurse said 'the doctor needs to speak to you'.

"It was like the world had been spun on its axis. Everyone was so shocked, and my parents were beside themselves.

"It was the first time in my life I saw my husband cry and he just sobbed.

“It became real then, to see everyone around me so upset drove home the dire reality.”

Ms Van der Woude said living with her diagnosis and treatment was a challenge both physically and psychologically.

“But with the negatives there are some positives,” she said.

“It has forced us to reassess our lives and I’ve learnt I have strength I didn’t know I had. You learn how to truly value life and really appreciate it because you know that it could all be so different.

“Spiritually and emotionally I have grown enormously but I still wouldn’t wish this on anyone.”

Typically bowel cancer has been portrayed as an “older person’s condition”, however, statistics show 1115 Australians under the age of 50 are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year.

To improve awareness, Bowel Cancer Australia has launched a new campaign, ‘Never Too Young’, based on a similar campaign in the United Kingdom.

It is aimed at providing resources designed for younger people, helping them to better understand their bowel cancer risk and how to take appropriate action.

Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service’s Queensland Bowel Cancer Screening Program health promotion officer Claire Condon hopes to see a time when bowel cancer is more freely spoken about, similar to how other cancers are discussed.

“It’s hard to believe there was once a time when breast cancer was never spoken about it,” Ms Condon said.

“Breasts weren’t something that people wanted to talk about. And I think bowel cancer is at that stage now.

“People don’t want to talk about bowel cancer but I think more we more talk about it, the more awareness can be raised.”

Ms Condon encourages young people to discuss any concerns they have with their GP.

For older Australians, the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is available, free of charge, to Australian residents who turn 50, 55, 60, 64, 65, 70, 72 and 74 years in 2016. These eligible residents receive a free testing kit in the mail.

For more information about the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program visit <https://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/national-bowel-cancer-screening-program>

Or, for more information about Bowel Cancer Australia’s latest campaign visit: <https://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/never-too-young>

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**Caption details**

“Ingrid Van Der Woude (1)”

Toowoomba mother Ingrid Van der Woude is speaking out about her experiences with bowel cancer in the hope of encouraging others to be proactive about their health.

“Ingrid Van Der Woude (2)”

Ingrid Van der Woude and her husband Chris Rake.

“Ingrid Van Der Woude (3)”

Toowoomba mother Ingrid Van der Woude with her children (from left) Carl, Julian and Tom Verdouw.

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