



Speech By  
**James Martin**


**MEMBER FOR STRETTON**

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## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **Bowel Cancer**

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (9.12 pm): I rise to address a distressing and perplexing health crisis—the alarming rise of bowel cancer among young Queenslanders. This is a mystery we must urgently solve. What is driving this deadly disease in those in the prime of their lives? Bowel cancer is now Australia's second deadliest cancer with over 15,000 new cases diagnosed annually. Traditionally linked to older age groups, we now see a disturbing surge in younger people. One in nine cases occurs in those under 50, with the incidence for ages 20 to 39 more than doubling, from 4.4 to 10.3 cases per 100,000, between 2001 and 2021. Most alarmingly, Australia holds the highest rate of early onset bowel cancer with 16.5 cases per 100,000 under the age of 50, surpassing the United States and New Zealand.

This issue hits close to home. It was exactly four years ago today that we lost Duncan Pegg, the former member for Stretton, to bowel cancer at the age of just 41. His diagnosis at such a young age underscores why young, healthy Queenslanders are increasingly vulnerable. Why is this happening?

In response, the federal government lowered the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program's eligible age to 45 from 1 July 2024, enabling 1.6 million more Australians and Queenslanders aged 45 to 49 to access free at-home screening kits. Early detection is vital, with over 90 per cent of cases treatable when caught early, yet screening alone does not answer the core question of what is causing this surge. The mystery persists due to a lack of definitive answers.

Researchers like Associate Professor Daniel Buchanan from the University of Melbourne suggest potential factors: changes in the gut microbiome, dietary shifts, obesity, sedentary lifestyles or environmental exposures like microplastics. A recent study in *The Lancet Oncology* confirms Australia's global lead, with those born in the 1990s up to three times more likely to develop bowel cancer than those born in the 1950s. Professor Mark Jenkins, head of the Colorectal Cancer Unit at the University of Melbourne, emphasised, 'Research is needed to really answer this question.' Without targeted research, we are left guessing why our young people are facing such a high risk compared to other nations.

While significant progress has been made in improving treatment and care with advancements in early detection and therapies saving lives, we must uncover the reason behind this alarming rise in cases and Queensland must play its part. With the budget coming up, I am calling on the Queensland government to fund dedicated research into the causes of early onset bowel cancer. We must partner with our leading institutions, our universities and the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute to investigate why Australia, and Queensland in particular, bears the brunt of this global phenomenon.