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Action required by: 16 May 2018

Memorandum: Coding issue affecting National Bowel Screening Programme apology letters

To: Hon Dr David Clark, Minister of Health

Purpose

To update you on an issue regarding the mailing out of apology letters within the National Bowel Screening Programme where people outside of the age range received this letter. Your office was informed of this issue on 11 May 2018.

Scope of issue

1. The Ministry of Health sent out approximately 9,500 letters of apology on 4 May following the “do not load list” incident where eligible people had not been invited to participation in the programme (HR 20180760 refers).
2. The National Coordination Centre (NCC) received a call on Friday 11 May from an 82 year old woman who received one of these letters despite being ineligible due to her age.
3. The Ministry undertook a rapid investigation of the reason why this person had received the apology letter. It was established that due to an error in the coding used to identify those affected by the incident a number of people outside of the eligible age had received the apology letter.
4. The issue occurred for people who had previously had an incorrect but eligible date of birth recorded in the history of their National Health Index (NHI) record, despite their current date of birth showing that they are not age eligible for the programme.
5. Initially it was thought approximately 130 people (out of 9,500) were affected, this has now been refined to 71 people.
6. As at midday 15 May, the NCC has received a total of four contacts (phone or email) related to this issue. The records of the four people are being reviewed.
7. This error pertains only to the creation of the apology letter for the 9,500 people. This letter could not be generated through the National Bowel Screening Interim IT System as it is a non-standard letter and the interim IT system does not have the flexibility to support a special mail out.
8. As this mail out was actioned outside of the Interim IT system the normal checks and balances contained within the IT system could not be applied. This issue therefore does not affect other programme participants.

Actions:

9. The records of the 71 people are being reviewed to ensure there are no other issues impacting the records of these people. This work will be completed by 16 May 2018.
10. The coding error has been corrected. Additional systems are being considered to strengthen quality control of analytical codes developed when accessing the NHI.

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11. The NCC have a process in place to provide participants affected by this issue with an apology as well as information and support.
12. The Ministry of Health is considering the communications approach for these people and will keep your office informed. A holding statement will be developed in case of any media questions.

END.

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