

Introduction

- ❑ Early detection of cancer improves outcomes¹. The national screening programme in the UK uses the Faecal Immunochemical Test²– a simple home test using a small stool sample to check for signs of bowel cancer.
- ❑ Around 1 in 3 eligible people do not complete screening, with lower uptake in some communities³.
- ❑ Barriers include limited knowledge, uncertainty, embarrassment and practical concerns⁴.
- ❑ Existing approaches, including text reminders and GP endorsed letters have had modest impact^{5,6}.
- ❑ Images may offer a more accessible, engaging approach, but little is known about what works for different communities.

Aim

To explore image and message preferences and co-design engaging screening images with people from groups with lower participation in bowel cancer screening.

Methods

- ❑ Qualitative online co-design workshops (3 groups with lower screening uptake): Black ethnic backgrounds, people living in socioeconomically deprived areas, and people with anxiety/depression.
- ❑ Participants recruited via Taylor McKenzie.
- ❑ Workshops explored experiences with screening, barriers and facilitators to uptake, and iteratively co-designed new images.
- ❑ Up to 12 images developed in real time by an artist in situ using participant feedback and AI-generated prompts; 2 images were finalised per workshop.
- ❑ Workshop discussions were analysed using the Framework Method⁷.

23 participants (n=23)

Aged 35-70 years

Equal representation of men and women overall

Living in London

Black ethnic backgrounds n=8

Living in deprived area in London n=7

Anxiety/depression n=8

Results

1 Reducing uncertainty Making bowel screening clear and understandable

“Also, the kit on the first poster, it looks pretty small, so...that would be a positive for me...if it was a big package, I'd be less likely to use it” (YAW2001, Low SES)



Participants wanted imagery to:

- Show what the screening kit looks like and help people know what to expect
- Make the screening process appear simple, quick and manageable at home
- Make clear who screening is for, why it is important and what people need to do
- Communicate essential information simply, without overwhelming people with detail
- Signpost where people can go for further information or support
- Use recognisable NHS branding to signal that the information is trustworthy and from an authoritative health source

Across the three groups, four themes capture how participants perceived and responded to bowel cancer screening images and messages.

2 Creating relatability Representing people and situations that feel relevant and authentic

“If you want to catch someone's attention, then you should have a poster that looks like them... because people, some people will look at that and think, well, yeah, it's not for me. Move on” (YAW1007, Black ethnic background).

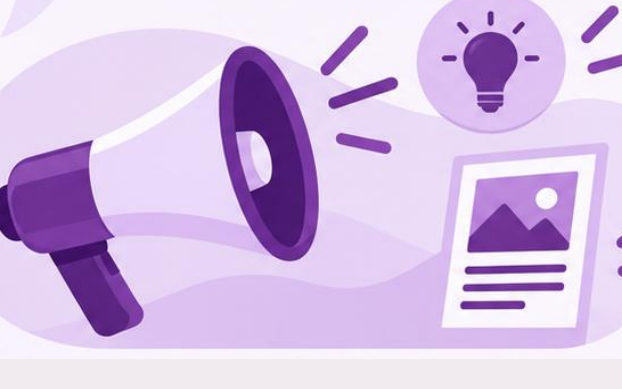


Participants wanted imagery to:

- Represent people of different ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds so that a wider range of people can see the message as relevant to them
- Reflect diversity in a natural way, without relying on stereotypes or appearing tokenistic
- Use familiar, recognisable settings that people can relate to
- Depict people and situations in ways that feel genuine and believable rather than posed or staged

3 Capturing attention without losing meaning Balancing creativity, clarity and credibility

“I think...a headline...that grabs your attention straight away. 'This little kit could save your life.' Why? Because you haven't said why. Why is it going to save my life? I mean, that's supposed to be in the headline. Yeah, it's got to be an attention grabber” (YAW3006, anxiety/depression).



Attention was drawn to (with mixed opinions):

- Use distinctive or unexpected ideas to attract attention and encourage people to stop and engage
- Use memorable language that feels appropriate for the intended audience
- Make the connection to bowel cancer screening immediately apparent
- Use simple layouts and a clear visual hierarchy so that the main message is easy to understand
- Use creativity to reinforce the screening message rather than compete with, or distract from it



Black ethnic backgrounds

Greater emphasis on authentic and culturally relevant representation without stereotypes or tokenism.



Anxiety/depression

Greater emphasis on a reassuring emotional tone that reduced fear without trivialising the seriousness of cancer.



Living in socioeconomically deprived areas

Views were reflected across all four themes, without one theme being particularly prominent in this group.



4 Normalising screening Showing screening in familiar, everyday settings

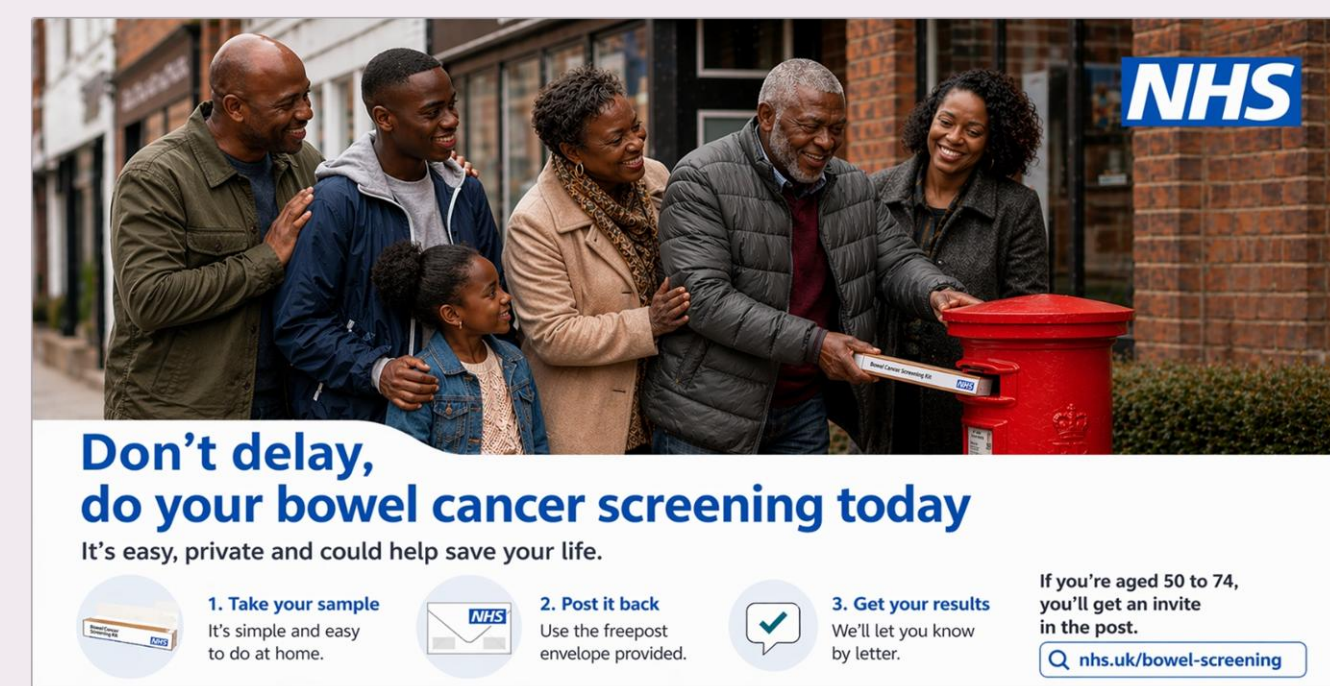
“I will say somewhere like normal every day...like where your comfort zone is, where family is... So it should show something like the community more focussing on family. So I would say something like that at home” (YAW1008, Black ethnic background).



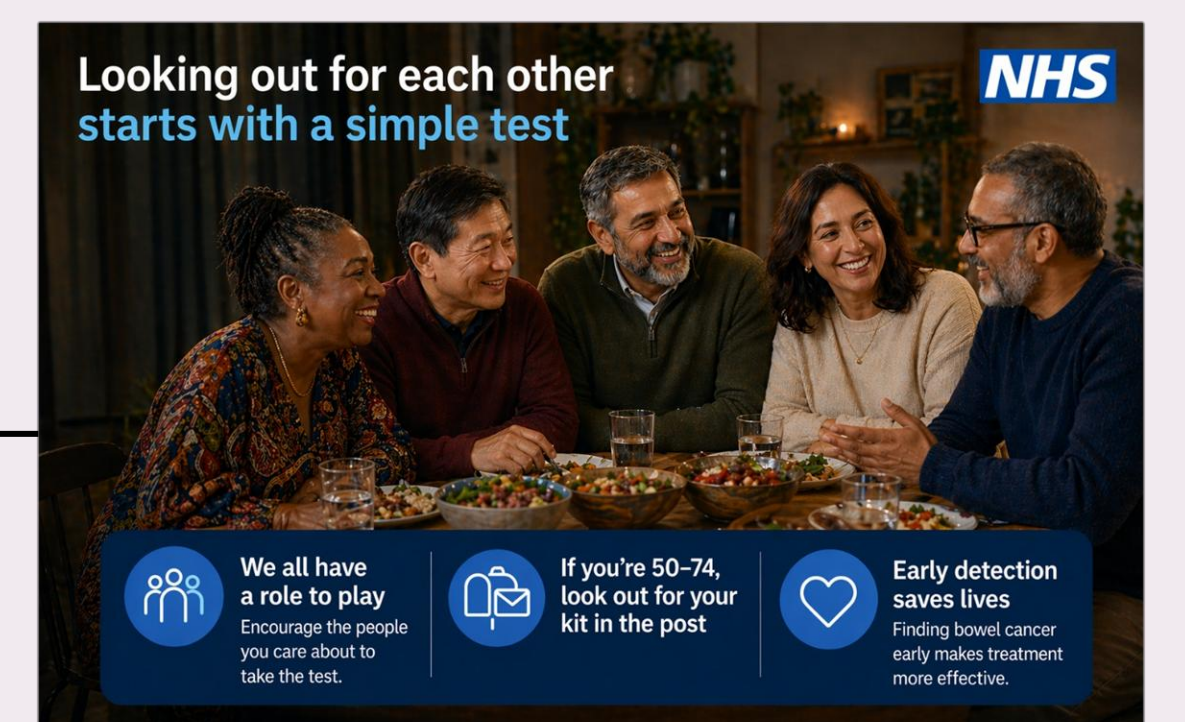
Participants wanted imagery to:

- Present conversations about screening as normal and comfortable rather than unusual or awkward
- Place screening within familiar, everyday settings where conversations about health could realistically happen
- Show family members and friends discussing screening in believable, informal ways
- Use warmth and positivity while still conveying the importance of bowel cancer screening
- Use humour carefully, recognising that what feels appropriate or engaging may differ by age, culture and individual preference
- Highlight the potential benefits of screening, including early detection, without minimising the seriousness of bowel cancer

Images created in the co-design workshops



Developed with participants from Black ethnic backgrounds



Developed with participants living in socioeconomically deprived areas



Developed with participants with anxiety/depression

Conclusion

- ❑ Effective screening imagery should capture attention while remaining clear, relatable and sensitive to different audiences.
- ❑ Images and messages should work together to make screening understandable, relevant and manageable.
- ❑ No single approach will resonate with everyone; tailored, authentic communication for different groups may help reduce uncertainty and encourage engagement with screening.

References

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