



“A Message from the Inspector General: Evaluation of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ Colorectal Cancer Screening Practices for Inmates and Its Clinical Follow-up on Screenings,” May 2025

Hello, I’m Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Today, my office released a report on the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or BOP’s, colorectal cancer screening practices for inmates and its follow-up on positive screening results. We initiated this evaluation following the deaths from colorectal cancer of two BOP inmates, Robert Hanssen and Frederick Bardell, as well as issues we’ve identified during prior unannounced inspections of BOP institutions.

Routine screening can help prevent colorectal cancer and detect it in early stages, when it might be easier to treat. BOP clinical guidance recommends that average risk inmates ages 45 to 74 be offered screening annually. However, our review found that, as of April 2024, less than two-thirds of such inmates were offered annual screening.

We also found serious issues in the BOP’s follow-up care for inmates who had a positive colorectal cancer screening. For example, ten percent of inmates in our sample who had a positive result had no documented follow-up treatment or care. Further, those inmates in our sample with a positive screening result who completed a follow-up colonoscopy had to wait an average of 8 months for their colonoscopy—with 6 percent waiting over 18 months—even though the BOP told us it aims to complete a colonoscopy within 3 months of a positive screening.

Documented follow-up care is crucial, as illustrated in the case of former FBI agent Robert Hanssen. Hanssen, one of the BOP’s highest profile inmates who was convicted of espionage and sentenced to life in prison, died of metastatic colon cancer in June 2023. While in prison, he received multiple positive colorectal cancer screening results, but no colonoscopy or other documented follow-up care. As a result, the BOP first learned that he had died of metastatic colon cancer following his autopsy and we were unable to determine why he hadn’t received a colonoscopy.

Moreover, delays in care can pose serious risks to health outcomes, as illustrated in the case of Frederick Bardell. Bardell died of metastatic colon cancer days after being released from BOP custody on a compassionate release order. While in custody, Bardell had reported seeing blood in his stool but experienced significant delays in follow-up care. Multiple appointments occurred weeks to months later than the BOP’s target dates for them. Pursuant to a federal judge’s referral, the OIG is conducting a separate investigation into the BOP’s handling of Bardell’s case.

To read today’s report and our 13 recommendations, please visit our website oig.justice.gov, or go to oversight.gov.

Thank you for joining me today.

(Stock media provided by composer William Pearson and publisher Prolific Two Publishing/Pond5.com, www.pond5.com.)
