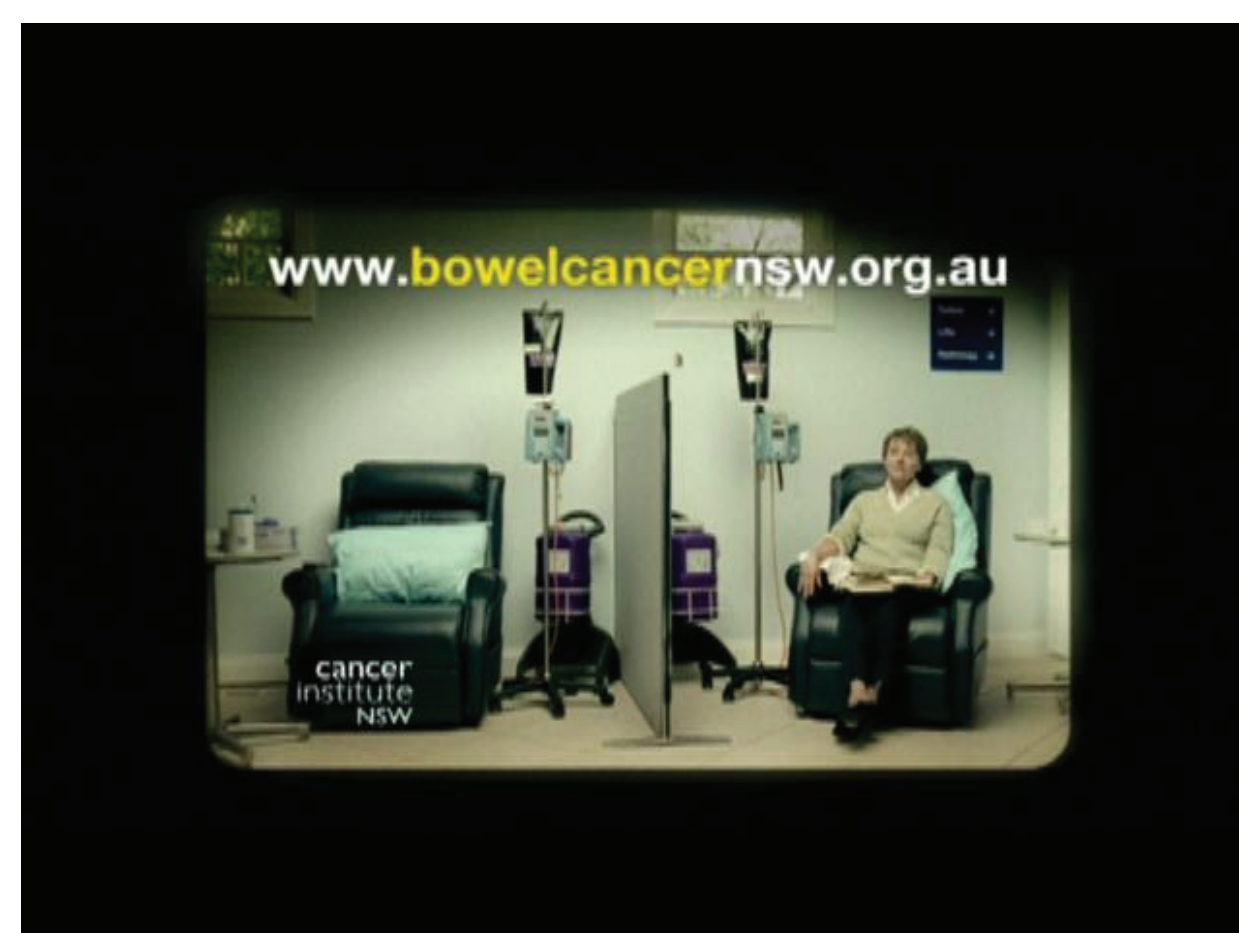


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Screen-shot of Armchairs television commercial

BACKGROUND

Although bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in men and women in New South Wales (NSW)¹, the perceived risk differs amongst the genders. A Bowel Cancer Awareness Campaign using mass media aimed at highlighting the risk, particularly for women was conducted in NSW over the period 22 April to 16 June 2007.

AIMS

The aim of this study is to assess gender differences in awareness and attitudes towards bowel cancer and response to the mass media campaign.

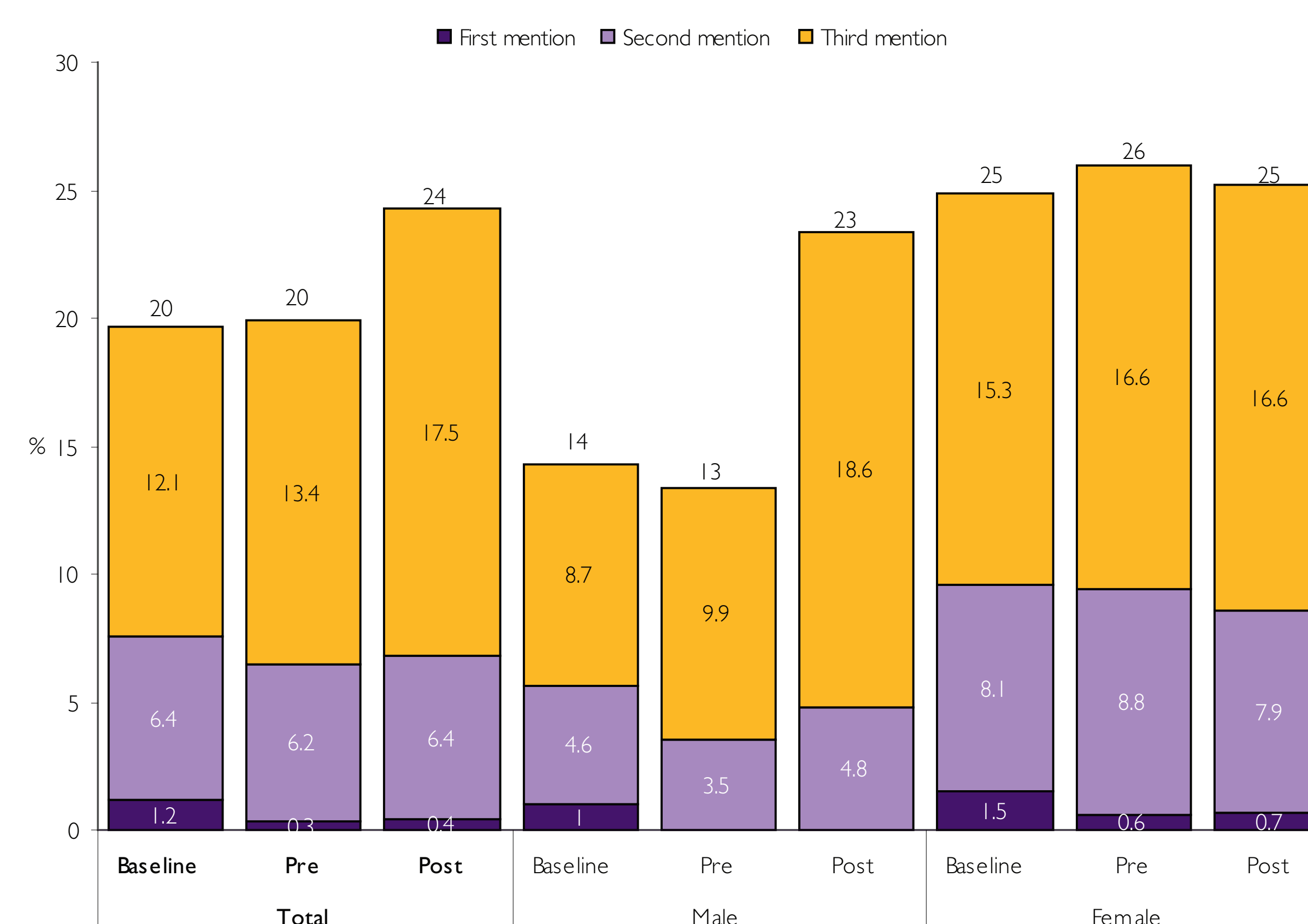
METHODOLOGY

The NSW Bowel Cancer Awareness Survey is a tool being used to monitor changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural intentions in relation to bowel cancer and bowel cancer screening. A baseline survey was conducted in 2006 (n=1000) and in 2007 the survey was implemented using a pre/post design (n=752 pre; n=501 post) to also assess the effectiveness of campaign advertising. Data was collected via telephone interview with NSW residents aged 40+ years.

RESULTS

To assess perceived prevalence of bowel cancer, respondents were asked to nominate what they thought were the three most common forms of cancer in men and women. At baseline, bowel cancer was ranked the fifth most common cancer in women and the third most common cancer in men, indicating that there is a misconception that women are at low risk of bowel cancer. Post-campaign, there was a slight increase in mentions of bowel cancer as one of the three most common forms of cancer in women (from 20% pre-campaign to 24% post-campaign), with a significant increase in awareness among men (Figure 1).

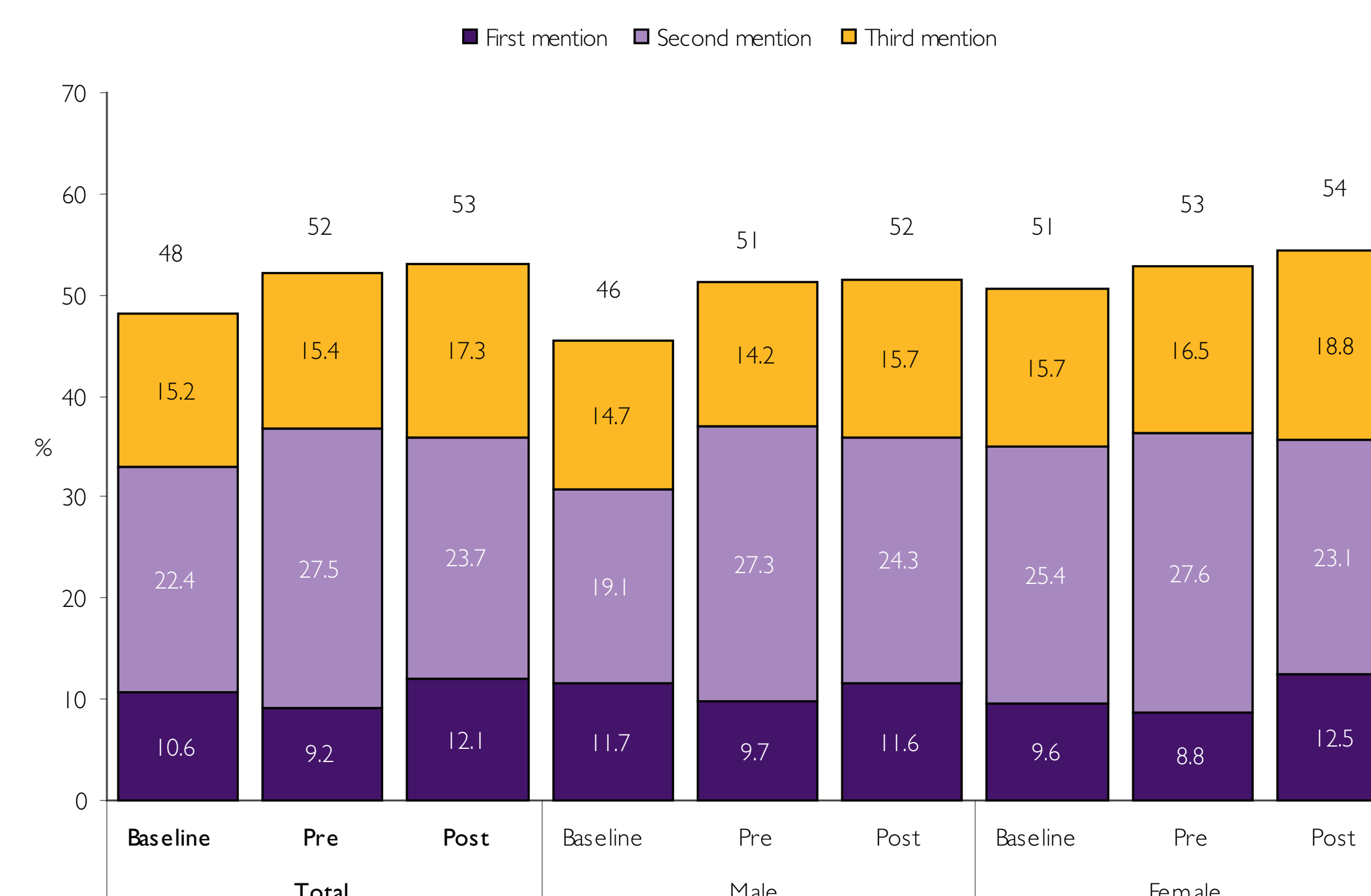
Figure 1 Mention of bowel cancer as one of the three most common forms of cancer in women



Further analysis of the post-campaign result reveals that 29% of persons who had seen the *Armchairs* advertisement mentioned bowel cancer as one of the three most common forms of cancer in women, compared with 18% of those who hadn't seen the ad.

Given the *Armchairs* ad places more emphasis on communicating the risks of bowel cancer for women, it is interesting to note that (see Figure 2) mentions of bowel cancer as one of the top three forms of cancer amongst men remain relative unchanged pre and post-campaign.

Figure 2 Mention of bowel cancer as one of the most common forms of cancer in men



In addition to identifying the most common forms of cancer in men and women, respondents were asked their agreement with the statement "Bowel cancer is more common in men than women". Overall, there was a significant decrease in agreement with this statement (59% pre-campaign to 51% post-campaign), with the proportion of women holding this view falling from 55% pre-campaign to 39% post-campaign. There was also a high level of agreement (78%) amongst those who had seen the *Armchairs* ad that it 'highlighted the risk of bowel cancer for women'.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the *Armchairs* ad was successful in highlighting the risk for women. Although there was only a slight increase in mentions of bowel cancer as one of the three most common forms of cancer in women, those who had seen the ad were more likely than those who hadn't to mention bowel cancer as one of the top three. This finding was also accompanied by a decrease in the level of agreement that "Bowel cancer is more common in men than women", particularly amongst women.

Public education regarding bowel cancer through mass media campaigns plays a key role in raising the profile of the illness and highlighting the risk for both men and women. The research however also identifies that more needs to be done in relation to raising the profile of bowel cancer and changing the perceptions of the disease. This will be an important accompaniment to the rollout of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program in NSW.



REFERENCES

¹Tracey EA, Chen S, Baker D, Bishop J, Jelfs P. Cancer in New South Wales: Incidence and Mortality 2004. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW, November 2006.