



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

15 April 2021

Deputy Holly Cairns  
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**Our Ref:** GM/Communications

**PQ16954/21** - To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the barriers that women with disabilities experience in accessing health screening services resulting in lower uptake of breast and cervical cancer screening; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**PQ16961.21** - To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that hoists are available in all BreastCheck for persons who need to have an alternative wheelchair to their own when using the mammogram machine; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above two Parliamentary Questions which I propose answering in one combined reply. I trust you are supportive of this approach.

I would like to reassure you that equality of access is an important part of the services we provide in both BreastCheck and CervicalCheck.

All of our breast screening units and mobile units are accessible to people with disabilities, and are accessible for most types of wheelchair. Women are asked to contact their local BreastCheck unit prior to attending to check so that their wheelchair can be accommodated in either the screening or mobile unit.

All BreastCheck units are equipped with loop systems to aid women with hearing impairments. We strive to continuously improve our buildings in line with recommendations from access audits. Accessible parking is available close to all our screening units.

For women who need extra support to avail of breast screening, we have communication materials to support their decision-making process. We have also produced materials to support the carers and care-home staff, as well as GPs and medical guardians of women who require extra assistance to avail of screening. Those leaflets are available for review at [BreastCheck.ie](http://BreastCheck.ie) under the heading *Breast screening for women who have a disability*.

Additionally, we have developed 'easy to read' leaflets, and a video with subtitles; the purpose being to encourage the participation of women who have learning disabilities. These materials have been developed in partnership with Kerry Parents and Friends, a group that includes and supports people who have disabilities. They shared their own experiences about attending for breast screening, and talked about what is important to them when attending health appointments and visiting health centres. The materials that resulted from this consultation can be viewed and downloaded at [breastcheck.ie/content/publications](http://breastcheck.ie/content/publications)

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It is important to note, however, that a person needs a certain level of physical ability to enable us perform a mammogram of diagnostic quality. We always err on the side of attempting to do a diagnostic mammogram on all clients who have a disability. However, occasionally it is not possible to perform a diagnostic examination.

The physical requirements for a suitable mammogram mean that the woman must be able to hold-up her head and lift her arms; she must have the flexibility to hold her arms clear of her chest and the breast support table, while the mammogram is taken; she must have sufficient muscle control to maintain the position required; and she must be able to remain still for approximately 15 seconds at a time.

Both BreastCheck and CervicalCheck programmes have Access Officers to ensure that people who have disabilities have their needs met; and when they are not met, their concerns are addressed. BreastCheck's access team is in place to "support and assist the Access Officer when developing, supporting, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of a service which is equitable to all women with disabilities aged 50-69 years".

When made aware of potential difficulties that may arise for a person who has a disability, we give it due individual attention. BreastCheck offers women who have disabilities longer appointments should they require extra time. We suggest that they contact the relevant unit in advance of their appointment to arrange a longer appointment slot if necessary. Women are welcome to bring a support person with them to their BreastCheck appointment. Many clinical and administration staff have completed access and disability training.

For cervical screening, information for women who have a disability, and their community screeners, is available at [CervicalCheck.ie](http://CervicalCheck.ie) under the heading *If you have a disability*. Our information materials are approved as Plain English by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

Women can choose to attend any of the services registered with CervicalCheck for their screening test. On our website we identify those GP practices and clinics registered with CervicalCheck that have wheelchair access. If a woman cannot be accommodated in primary care GPs have the option to refer her to the nearest colposcopy clinic to ensure she has access to screening.

The needs of people with disabilities is a pillar of our new Public Health-led Equity Strategy. The strategy is being developed in partnership with people who have disabilities, and advocacy groups.

I trust this answers your query. If you have any further queries please contact me.

Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

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