



19 December 2022

Deputy Colm Burke
colm.burke@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ61234/22: To ask the Minister for Health the action his Department is taking to address the low uptake in BowelScreen for women in at-risk populations; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

Bowel cancer screening is available to all people aged 60 to 69 years living in Ireland. The BowelScreen test is conducted in the person's home, with a testing kit that arrives in the post, and is returned in the post.

It is known that socially excluded groups are less likely to participate in population cancer screening programmes. This may be because they find it difficult to engage with health services, or that we have communicated with them in a way that isn't easily understood by them.

In September, the Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly announced an additional €50,000 in funding for bowel screening services through the Women's Health Fund. This will support a qualitative piece of research conducted in 2023 that will try to identify the reasons for low uptake among some categories of women which will enable the programme to plan for specific targeted campaigns in the future.

Working to reduce inequity in screening

We are also working on an equity strategy to reduce inequity in screening and ensure that every step of the screening journey, from invitation to treatment, is accessible. You can read more about our equity strategy in the News section of screeningservice.ie, [here](#).

Some of the actions in our equity strategy development include:

- Working in partnership with Pavee Point to improve uptake in the Traveller community, by taking a culturally-sensitive, community-centred and community-led approach.
- Developing a range of new materials to help increase understanding of screening among migrant communities, including multilingual videos. You can read about our progress in this area, particularly as it relates to our creation of videos in Russian and Ukrainian, in the News section of screeningservice.ie, [here](#).
- Developing a document to support participation in bowel screening for carers, to enable them support at-risk people to make informed choices about bowel screening. This document aims to complement the easy-read materials that we have also developed. All materials were tested and agreed with our partners in the disability sector before being published. See the materials in the Information Resources section of bowelscreen.ie, [here](#).





Research to understand the patient experience

The BowelScreen Patient Experience survey was launched earlier this year and will gather feedback from screening participants, and will explore their experiences at each stage of their BowelScreen journey. Their responses will provide us with information on how well we communicate, the standard of our services, and to identify where improvements can be made across the programme, including our colonoscopy units.

The findings of the survey will be available in early 2023 and will inform future service development in order to maximise attendance. Read more about this [here](#).

In 2021, we completed a large-scale survey to understand people's attitudes to screening. Based on this, we have created an action plan to increase knowledge and understanding of screening, with the aim of reducing some of the barriers to screening participation and increasing uptake rates. You can read more about the results of the survey in the News section of screeningservice.ie, [here](#).

Some of our actions to reduce barriers to participation and increase uptake include:

- A communications campaign in April, and a second campaign in Oct/Nov that ran across press, radio, digital and social media, with a partner pack for our screening partners. The campaign will run again in January 2023.
- New communications materials that included an animated video to explain BowelScreen and how to do the home test.

We are working with behavioural science researchers at Dublin City University to create new wording and design of our screening reminder letters, with the aim of increasing screening uptake among the eligible population, including women in at-risk populations.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy,
Chief Executive.

