



8 March 2022

Deputy Duncan Smith  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ9876/22: To ask the Minister for Health the total annual spend on BreastCheck in each of the years 2017 to 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the query above.

The BreastCheck screening programme offers free mammograms to women aged between 50 and 69 at four static and 22 mobile BreastCheck units throughout the country.

Screening is delivered on a two-year cycle to all areas of the country. Women are recalled or offered further investigation and treatment on the basis of the mammogram outcome. The BreastCheck programme includes mammography screening, assessment – which may involve biopsy - and treatment, including surgery.

The expenditure on BreastCheck for the years 2017 to 2020 is shown in the following table. The expenditure figure for 2021 is not yet available.

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020
Expenditure (€million)	21.217	22.903	27.433	27.642

### Pause in breast screening in 2020

BreastCheck was paused between March and the end of October 2020. The programme was paused in order to protect participants and staff by complying with social distancing guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The 2020 expenditure figure above reflects this disruption of services.

Due to COVID-19 some people's invitation for breast screening has been delayed by approximately a year. If a woman was due to be screened in 2021, we will now aim to invite her in 2022.

We aim to return to screening women every 2 years as soon as possible. This depends on the situation with COVID-19 and restrictions continuing to ease.

During the pause in breast screening services, BreastCheck staff were temporarily redeployed into symptomatic and other services, including the response to COVID-19. Support was provided to assess and treat women who were at high risk of breast cancer, and whose hospital appointments had been delayed because of COVID-19.

This temporary redeployment of services enabled high-risk patients who had symptoms to

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be seen quicker, with the aim of improving the outcome of any diagnosis during a time when breast health resources were constrained. This cohort of symptomatic women has been shown to have a significantly higher rate of cancer, and more time-dependent diagnosis, than the screened cohort.

### Early detection

We continue to emphasise to our participants that BreastCheck is a screening service for well women within the population age range (50-69 years) and is not for women with symptoms. If a person has any concerns or symptoms concerning their breasts, they should not attend screening and should instead contact their GP who will give them the appropriate advice.

It is important that every woman is breast aware. This means knowing what is normal for her so that if any unusual change occurs, she will recognise it.

The sooner a woman notices a change, the better, because if cancer is found early, treatment is more likely to be successful. It is important for women to get into the habit of looking at and feeling their breasts at least on a monthly basis.

More information on techniques for checking breasts is available on [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie). People can also call our Freephone number 1800 45 45 55; or email us at [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie)

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

Yours sincerely,

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Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Ciock  
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púitige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Riatraí do Dhiabaitigh  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme