

10 June 2022

Deputy Cathal Crowe
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ28964/22: To ask the Minister for Health if his Department will ensure that all women over the age of 64 years can access free breast cancer screening; if he will outline the aftercare services that are available for women recovering from breast cancer; and when a full lymphoedema clinic will be available in Ennis, County Clare.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

BreastCheck age range

BreastCheck invites all women aged between 50 and 69 for a breast screening mammogram (X-ray of the breast) every two years. This is because international evidence has shown the incidence and mortality from breast cancer in this age group means it is effective to screen women in this age range.

Screening programmes are organised based on achieving a balance of the benefits and the potential harms of screening, and the cost-effectiveness of the programme.

The current screening group has been chosen because the evidence shows that the benefits that can be gained by that group from screening outweigh the harms; and that the use of resources for screening is a cost-effective way of improving population health with regard to the condition.

However, all screening programmes are dynamic and part of our role is to monitor evidence and practice and respond when the evidence is sufficient to warrant change. In 2015 the BreastCheck extended the age range to 69 on a phased basis and this was completed in 2021. We continue to keep the age range for breast cancer screening under review.

Any revisions to our screening programme are considered by the National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC). This is an independent committee that advises the Minister and Department of Health on all new proposals for population-based screening programmes and revisions to existing programmes. More information about the NSAC can be found on its website [here](#).

Encouraging women to be symptom aware

We continue to ask women of every age to look out for symptoms.

If a person has any concerns or symptoms concerning their breasts, they should contact their GP who will give them the appropriate advice.

Symptoms of breast cancer can include:

- a lump in either breast
- discharge from either of the nipples (which may be streaked with blood)
- a lump or swelling in either of the armpits

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- a change in the size or shape of one or both breasts
- dimpling on the skin of the breasts
- a rash on or around the nipple
- a change in the appearance of the nipple, such as becoming sunken into the breast

It is important that women of every age are breast aware. This means knowing what is normal for them so that if any unusual change occurs, they will recognise it. The sooner a person notices a change, the better, because if cancer is found early, treatment is more likely to be successful. We advise that women 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 breastcheck.ie

If there is anything else the BreastCheck programme can assist you with please don't hesitate to contact us.

We provide updates on breast screening on www.breastcheck.ie Women can also contact us on info@breastcheck.ie or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

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.

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30th June 2022

PQ28964/22: To ask the Minister for Health if his Department will ensure that all women over the age of 64 years can access free breast cancer screening; if he will outline the aftercare services that are available for women recovering from breast cancer and when a full lymphoedema clinic will be available in Ennis, County Clare.

Dear Deputy Crowe,

There are number of supports available for patients with cancer including:

- Community Cancer Support Centres are in most local communities and provide support services for cancer patients, their families and carers. They have a wide range of individual and group programmes and supports available including counselling and psychological support, manual lymphatic drainage for lymphoedema, physical activity programmes, survivorship programmes and complementary therapies. It should be noted that a physician referral is required prior to commencement of some of these services.
- There are approximately 50 Community Cancer Support Centres throughout Ireland, all of whom provide professionally delivered services to cancer patients and their families free of charge. A list of the support centres in each area can be found using the following link:
<https://www.cancer.ie/local-support>
- Survivorship Programmes, including the Cancer Thriving and Surviving (CTS) Programme, help patients with the transition from active treatment to living well with and beyond cancer.
- The CTS Programme helps and empowers patients as they finish treatment and transition and move into the survivorship period. The programme includes sessions that address the recovery of self-confidence, adjustment to a changed self, and confidence to self-manage cancer-related problems and to promote recovery of well-being and successful transition to survivorship, following a cancer diagnosis. The National Cancer Control Programme provides training for the CTS programme and co-ordinates its implementation nationally.
- LACES (Life and Cancer- Enhancing Survivorship) is a signposting and information workshop for cancer patients, developed by the NCCP and ICS. It is available nationally. It runs weekly and is open to all patients (over 18 years) who have completed their treatment ie radiation therapy, surgery, chemotherapy and for advanced cancer patients.
- The LACES workshop allows patients to access appropriate information and signposting to improve their quality of life after cancer. The focus is on health and well-being, enhancing the use of community supports and survivorship programmes.

Lymphoedema Services

Lymphoedema can severely impact quality of life and lead to complications if not diagnosed early and managed correctly. This condition results from a number of conditions and is not unique to cancer patients, hence the Lymphoedema Services are being coordinated via the HSEs Primary Care Strategy & Planning unit.

In line with Service Planning funding, the NCCP awarded grant aid to some Cancer Support Centres to commence or enhance their lymphoedema service delivery. The community Cancer Support Centres are well-placed to provide this much needed service and in many cases already do. Providing this service free of charge in the community ensures that patients get the right care, at the right time, in the right place. This grant aid was awarded by the NCCP on agreement that the Cancer Support Centres participated in impact monitoring research to assess the impact of this service on the service users quality of life. NCCP also liaise with the Cancer Centres and have provided some “once off” funding to support lymphedema services for cancer patients where patient are attending for their treatments. NCCP also support the recruitment of HSCP grades within cancer centres to enhance support services to patient undergoing treatment.

Ennis Lymphoedema Specialist Clinic

Extract from HSE Broadcast email Aug 2021: Clare is providing a blueprint for the roll out of Lymphoedema Specialist Clinics across the country with the first service of its kind in primary care being piloted in Ennis. The Lymphoedema Specialist Clinic in Clare opened in 2021 to support people living with this progressive, disabling chronic condition. Lymphoedema can severely impact quality of life and lead to complications if not diagnosed early and managed correctly. The new clinic brings together a nurse, physiotherapist and multi-task attendant to offer lymphoedema assessments, treatment and supported self-care. The clinic will also provide treatment for lipoedema, which requires similar management to lymphoedema.

This first-of-its-kind service is open to people living in Clare and if there is capacity, the criteria will be extended to include North Tipperary. The service is based in an out-patient setting. The service is taking referrals from consultants, GPs, HSCP and nursing and is linking with the UL Hospital Group for people with lymphoedema diagnosed in hospital. There is a direct referral pathway from the new lymphoedema early detection project in the oncology services. Education is also available for local GPs, primary care teams and acute services to ensure early, appropriate referrals.

Further enquiries need to be directed to Ms Kay Morris, Project Manager Lymphoedema Services, Primary Care Strategy & Planning & Grainne Ryan, Project Lead Implementation of Lymphoedema Services, Director of Public Health Nursing, Clare.

Yours sincerely



Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide
National Director
National Cancer Control Programme

