



05 December 2022

Deputy David Cullinane  
[david.cullinane@oireachtas.ie](mailto:david.cullinane@oireachtas.ie)

Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ57589/22: To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the development of the National Cervical Screening Laboratory; the timeframe for delivery of the project; the cost of the project to date; the unmet staffing requirements for the laboratory; the estimated final cost of the project; the estimated annual running cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

### **National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL)**

A strategic decision was made (arising from recommendations of the Dr Scally Report) in 2018 to develop the NCSL in Ireland in conjunction with the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) in Dublin.

The NCSL is being developed by the HSE and the CWIUH to become a national centre of excellence for cervical screening. It will be commissioned by Ireland's cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck, to process women's cervical screening samples. All equipment installed is now undergoing testing and validation to ensure it meets the required standards. The lab is expected to be operating by year-end.

Recruitment of skilled staff will be a top priority for several years as the NCSL increases the number of CervicalCheck samples it receives. A workforce plan is in place and essential roles in cytopathology, virology and medical scientists have been identified.

The Coombe has recruited 11.9 WTE staff for the NCSL, with 5.3 WTE posts under recruitment. Dr Cillian De Gascun has been appointed Interim Director (ID) for the NCSL and will lead out on the commencement and operation of the NCSL. The ID will work closely with the laboratory manager in the commissioning of the NCSL's services, including the operation of its HPV and cytology services.

The position of Lead Pathologist of NCSL has been filled by Dr Aoife Doyle.

As more key roles are filled, the NCSL will work towards becoming the main provider of laboratory services for CervicalCheck over the coming years.

During the course of the long-term the NCSL building project we have continued to offer our participants a quality assured public screening service in line with national and international best practice.

What continues to be of importance for the majority of women who use our screening service is that they receive their results on time and are assured that the laboratories' processes are fit for purpose and meet the quality assurance standards. This is the case in the Irish cervical screening programme, and this assurance was given in Dr Scally's Final Review report, where we noted the "excellent quality assurance" of our US-contracted laboratory.

After NCSL is established a secondary laboratory contractor will remain necessary to ensure





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resilience in the system.

### Costs of the NCSL

The cost of project to date is €13.3M. An estimated final cost of the project is €20M based on the original budget of €15M for build and refurbishment and €5M for equipping (this includes refurbishment of the existing laboratory to include upgrade of fire safety systems).

The estimated annual running cost will be dependent on the number of cervical screening samples processed and is also commercially sensitive given that CervicalCheck will be tendering for work to be undertaken.

### Cervical screening

CervicalCheck - the national cervical screening programme, plays an important role in preventing cervical cancer in Ireland. Our most recent data shows a continued decreasing incidence in the number of women who develop cervical cancer, with a 2.8% annual percentage decrease from 2010-2018. In the first ten years of the programme it provided almost 3.2 million cervical screening tests, and detected over 115,000 abnormalities (including 64,000 high grade abnormalities), many of which could have developed into cervical cancer if not detected through screening.

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.

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.  
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ info@screeningservice.ie www.screeningservice.ie



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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 Ráiteil do Dhiabéitigh  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme