



7 December 2022

Deputy David Cullinane TD
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ57591.22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of referrals made to cancer screening services to date in 2022.

PQ57592.22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists for cancer screening services; the average length of wait from referral to screening by region; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy O’Sullivan,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions, which I intend to answer as one. I trust you are agreeable with this approach.

Ireland’s three national cancer screening programmes – BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelScreen – invite people to take part in screening at regular intervals from the time they become eligible for screening.

A screening test is designed for people who do not have symptoms. It aims to identify those who are at a higher risk of developing disease and provide them with diagnosis and treatment earlier than when symptoms may develop.

A screening test is not a diagnostic test and people are not referred for cancer screening. They opt to take part in screening. This means there are no waiting times from referral to time of screen, or referral numbers, to report.

BreastCheck

BreastCheck invites eligible women aged from 50 to 69 years, for breast screening on an area-by-area basis every two years. We call this process a screening ‘round’. Our mobile units move around over the course of each round depending on the size of the population that is eligible for screening in each area. The BreastCheck mobile stays in location until all eligible women who are in the catchment area for that mobile unit have been invited.

The first invitation will depend on when screening is available in a woman’s area. This is normally within two years of her 50th birthday.

Along with many public services, BreastCheck was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme was paused for several months in 2020 and 2021, and because of this, it is taking longer to get through the current screening round.

BreastCheck is back to nearly normal numbers attending for screening daily, despite extra

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National Screening Service

COVID-19 measures still being in place. In 2021, we screened approximately 127,000 women against a target of 110,000 for the year. From the start of 2022, to the end of October, we screened approximately 132,000* women against a target of 124,000 for those same months. We aim to be back to two-yearly screens by autumn 2023. This is dependent on meeting the challenge of staff recruitment and retention.

CervicalCheck

CervicalCheck offers free primary HPV cervical screening every three years to women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 29; and every five years to those aged 30 to 65 years. The programme is up to date with invites for screening.

BowelScreen

Bowel 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. In 2021, we screened approximately 91,000 people against a target of 87,500. In 2022, from the start of January to the end of October, we screened approximately 107,000* people, against a target of 119,000 for those same months. The programme was impacted significantly by the changing COVID-19 environment and the cyber-attack, which means screening invitations are currently delayed by up to a year.

*Figures for 2022 are unverified.

Screening updates

We provide updates on breast, cervical and bowel screening on www.breastcheck.ie, www.cervicalcheck.ie, and www.bowelscreen.ie respectively. People can also contact us on info@breastcheck.ie, info@cervicalcheck.ie, and info@bowelscreen.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
National Screening Service

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National Screening Service



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cerebheacs
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Puitéige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



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