



25 September 2023

Deputy Neasa Hourigan
neasa.hourigan@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ37663/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of radiographers required to ensure BreastCheck screenings take place every two years for those that are eligible; how many radiographers currently work for BreastCheck; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ37664/23: To ask the Minister for Health whether it is possible for the BreastCheck programme to provide screening to the eligible population every two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ37665/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of people who were eligible for participation in the BreastCheck screening programme in each of the years 2016 to 2022, in tabular form, even if they did not respond to an invitation for screening.

PQ37666/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of people who were invited for screening; the number of people who attended screening; and the number of people who were referred for further examination as a result of their screening appointment in each of the years 2016 to 2022, in tabular form.

PQ37667/23: To ask the Minister for Health the cost per person participating in the BreastCheck screening programme in each of the years 2016 to 2022, in tabular form.

PQ37668/23: To ask the Minister for Health the cost per person participating in the BreastCheck for an individual person referred for further examination as a result of their screening appointment in each of the years 2016 to 2022, in tabular form.

Dear Deputy,

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

About BreastCheck

BreastCheck is Ireland's free breast screening programme. We screen healthy women who have no symptoms so that we can find and treat breast cancer at the earliest possible stage. We provide breast screening for women aged 50 to 69, every 2 years and provide access to appropriate care for those who need further tests and treatment. We work to make BreastCheck services accessible to all, for example providing longer or group appointments, and information in braille and international languages.

There are four regional centres responsible for the delivery of BreastCheck throughout the country: Eccles Street and Merrion Road in Dublin; Newcastle Road in Galway; and Infirmary Road in Cork.

As not all eligible women wish, or are able, to travel to one of these regional centres, an important principle for the BreastCheck programme is to offer screening services locally to women in locations convenient to where they live. To achieve this, each of the four screening units operates

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



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

BreastCheck
An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála Ceiríoch
The National Breast Screening Programme

CervicalCheck
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CÉIRÍECHAS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME

BowelScreen
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthásúlaithe do Chraobharach
The National Bowel Screening Programme

Diabetic RetinaScreen
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthásúlaithe Retiníoch Dhaonlathach
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



in tandem with our mobile units. The majority of women participating in BreastCheck have their mammogram in one of these 24 units. Since 2020, we have introduced three additional mobile units to increase capacity. Our mobile units move around over the course of each screening round depending on the size of the population that is eligible for screening in each area. The BreastCheck mobile stays in its location until all eligible women who are in the catchment area for that mobile unit have been invited. We update our breast screening locations regularly on our [website](#).

Two-yearly screening

Along with many public services, BreastCheck was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the programme being paused in 2020 and 2021, almost a year of screening was lost and because of this, it is taking longer to complete the current screening round. In addition, once screening resumed, we could not screen as many women as before the pandemic, due to social distancing requirements. However, the number of women attending BreastCheck is now close to pre-pandemic numbers. We aim to return to two-yearly screening during 2023. This is dependent on capacity within the programme and the ongoing challenges of recruitment and retention.

Staffing

We need 1.8 radiographers per 10,000 women (approx. 105 radiographers) to offer screening to women every two years. We have 71 radiographers on staff and are actively recruiting. We have recruited 11 senior radiographers to our team in 2023. However, our staffing levels reflect the fact that there is a national and international shortage of radiographers across all healthcare facilities. Proposals to address recruitment challenges include the development of a 10-year strategic workforce plan. A new Breast Radiology Workforce Group has also been established.

Number of people eligible and invited for screening

The below table shows the eligible population for screening, those invited for screening, those screened and those who were recalled for assessment in the BreastCheck screening programme in each of the years 2016 to 2022. We have also included figures of what would be considered the eligible population per year as BreastCheck is a two-year screening round where the eligible population is invited over the course of two years.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 ⁴	2021 ⁴	2022 ⁵
Eligible population (50-69 year olds)¹	514,400	525,502	536,395	546,735	558,233	571,411	584,277
Eligible population (50-69 year olds) to be invited per year²	257,200	262,751	268,198	273,368	279,117	285,706	292,139
Invited for screening³	125,546	225,256	231,276	238,660	75,932	199,890	220,388
Screened	88,151	161,573	170,528	170,918	56,255	123,891	156,782
Recall to assessment	3,405	6,364	7,070	7,043	2,617	6,115	8,372

¹ Figures from Census 2016 & 2022.

² Based on a two-year screening round and eligible women being invited over two years.

³ Numbers invited for screening are aligned with programme capacity, including staffing levels. Numbers invited in 2020 and 2021 reflect the impact of COVID-19 pauses, social distancing requirements and staffing levels.

⁴ COVID-19 pauses.

⁵ 2022 figures are subject to validation.





Programme costs

The below tables outlines the cost per person participating in BreastCheck and the cost per person participating in BreastCheck for an individual person referred for further examination as a result of their screening appointment in each of the years 2016 to 2022.

Year	Cost per person participating (€)	Referred for further examination (€)**
2016	118	5,657
2017	75	2,635
2018	78	2,549
2019	87	2,943
2020*	296	8,593
2021*	135	3,757
2022	119	3,142

*COVID-19 pandemic.

**The referred include woman's journey from being invited to screening and on to the end of primary surgery which is provided by BreastCheck.

Being breast aware

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 breast health, they should not wait for or 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. If cancer is found early, treatment is more likely to be successful. It is therefore important for women to get into the habit of looking at and checking their breasts at least on a monthly basis. More information on checking your breasts is available on www.breastcheck.ie

Women who have additional questions regarding breast screening can contact Freephone 1800 45 45 55 from 9am-6pm, Monday to Friday; or email info@breastcheck.ie

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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