



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

16 May 2025

Deputy Dessie Ellis  
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ20808.25: To ask the Minister for Health the number waiting for a BreastCheck through the HSE's national screening service for each CHO; the average wait time for BreastCheck for each CHO; and if she will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions.

### About BreastCheck

BreastCheck is Ireland's free breast screening programme. We screen women who have no symptoms of breast cancer so that we can find and treat breast cancer at the earliest possible stage. We 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 additional languages.

We have four BreastCheck static screening units and 24 mobile clinics across the country. We update our breast screening locations regularly on our [website](#). Mobile clinics enable us to provide breast screening for more women across the country.

### Invitations to screening

We don't collect or record data per Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) area; therefore I have provided national figures that I hope you will find sufficient.

There are 625,057 women eligible for our BreastCheck programme. This number has grown from approximately 524,000 in 2019, a 19% increase in the eligible population in 6 years,

We do not operate a waiting list for BreastCheck. Women are invited as they become eligible and we are screening in their area. In line with our [BreastCheck Charter](#), we aim to invite women for their first screening test by age 52, and every two years after that, up to the age of 69. Some women may be 53 when we invite them for their first appointment, depending on when we are screening in their area and some women may have more than two years between their screening appointments. The majority of women are seen every 2 years.

As of 9 May 2025, there are 84,550 women due to be invited whose last invitation was 27 months ago or more, or who have been eligible for more than 27 months. We do not expect all of these women to attend when invited. Over 17,000 of the above women did not attend for screening when last invited. However, all women are given the opportunity to come for screening, regardless of whether they attended when previously invited.

### BreastCheck operations

We are facing a number of challenges which mean some women are waiting longer than two years between screening appointments or to have their first screen:

- Screening time lost during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the catch up programme when [we offered screening to more women](#) meant some women were waiting more than 2 years for their breast screening appointment. We have been unable to return to a complete 2-year cycle of invitations since then for many reasons.
- Growing population: An increasing number of women are eligible for BreastCheck and our staffing numbers are not increasing in line with the population increase. There is an

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ongoing global shortage of radiology and radiography staff; both are key to delivering BreastCheck across our national network of mobiles and static units.

- **Missed appointments:** Every appointment not filled represents lost screening time. Almost 50% of all women due their first mammogram don't attend, meaning capacity and time lost when we could be screening other women.

### Addressing challenges

We are working to maximise our capacity and position BreastCheck for the future.

- **Recruitment:** Since January 2023, we have recruited 12 consultants and 18 senior radiographers. We received approval to fill several critical replacement posts during the 2023/24 HSE recruitment embargo. While the HSE Pay and Numbers Strategy reduced the number of posts approved for BreastCheck, we secured funding and approval for an increase in our ceiling for consultants and radiographers in 2025 and hope to do so again in 2026. We have advertised internationally and we are continuing to expand training positions so that we have senior doctors on a pathway to future recruitment.
- **Infrastructure:** We have introduced three additional mobile units since 2020, and are seeking to introduce further units in line with funding and available clinical staffing.
- **Information technology:** In 2024, we introduced a new patient database system which is enabling our BreastCheck teams to focus more time on direct patient care and address any gaps in service delivery. We are exploring how new technology such as AI can help us be more efficient and effective in delivering a quality assured service.
- **Maximising capacity:** We have increased our use of text messaging to provide attendance reminders to women, ensuring a greater number of appointment slots are filled. We are working to provide women with their BreastCheck information through the new HSE Health App. This could enable women to communicate with us about their appointment time, and to pre-consent for screening through the app, freeing up more time for screening delivery and helping ensure we fill every appointment slot.
- We are focusing on inviting women who may be more at risk of breast cancer, including women newly eligible for screening, those waiting longest between screens, and women in marginalised groups who may find our services harder to access. This includes specific equity-focused projects, such as working with [traveller communities in Finglas and Blanchardstown](#) and providing interpreter-enabled clinics for women where English isn't their first language.

Eligible women who are due a screening mammogram, or who have been unable to take up a previous screening invitation, can contact BreastCheck by email at [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie), or by phoning [1800 45 45 55](tel:1800454555), Monday to Friday between 8am–5pm.

### Being breast aware

BreastCheck is a screening service for women aged 50-69 who do not have symptoms of breast cancer. Women with concerns or symptoms concerning their breast health should not wait for or attend screening and should contact their GP for the appropriate advice.

It is important that every woman is breast aware. More information on checking breasts, and on how a woman can reduce her risk of breast cancer, is available on [hse.ie/breastcheck](https://hse.ie/breastcheck).

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy,  
Chief Executive.

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