



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

4 June 2025

Deputy Réada Cronin
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ 26584/25: To ask the Minister for Health if mammograms will be offered to women below the age of 52, as is currently required; if research is being carried out on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

About BreastCheck

BreastCheck is Ireland's free breast screening programme for women aged between 50 and 69. 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.

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BreastCheck operations

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 two years.

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 two years for their breast screening appointment. We have been unable to return to a complete two-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 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.

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Addressing challenges

You can read about how we are working to maximise our capacity and position BreastCheck for the future on our [website](#). Some of our work includes:

- **Recruitment:** Since January 2023, we have recruited 9 consultants and 18 senior radiographers. We received approval to fill several critical replacement posts during the 2023/24 HSE recruitment embargo. 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.
- **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. We are working to provide women with information through the new HSE Health App which could help us ensure we fill every appointment slot and allow women to pre-consent for screening, creating more time for screening.
- 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.

Eligible age range

All screening programmes are dynamic and responsive to change, and all changes to population screening programmes must first be approved by the National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) based on an evidence review. This independent committee makes recommendations to the Minister for Health and the Department of Health.

NSAC is progressing work to consider the further expansion of BreastCheck to women aged 46-49 and aged 70-74 and submitted a request to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to assess whether there is evidence for a further expansion of the BreastCheck programme. We await the committee's recommendation on whether it is advisable to offer screening to women in these age ranges.

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.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy,
Chief Executive.