

30 May 2025

Deputy Joe Neville
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ26735/25: To ask the Minister for Health if she will increase the number of breast screening locations, given that the wait time of some patients is over a year; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I am writing to you in response to your above Parliamentary Question.

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 aim to invite women for their screening test by age 52 and every two years after that, up to the age of 69. Some women may be 53 when they are offered their first appointment and some will have three years between appointments, depending on when we are screening in their area.

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.

Each of the four screening units operates in tandem with our mobile units. The majority of women participating in BreastCheck have their mammogram in one of these 24 mobile units that move between 54 different locations across the country. Mobile units stay in [each location](#) until we have invited eligible women in that area for breast screening.

BreastCheck operations

The number of women eligible for breast screening has grown from 524,000 in 2019 to 625,000 in 2025. This increase in the eligible population is challenging because:

- we screened fewer women in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19, which interrupted our cycle of 2-yearly screening invitations
- our clinical staff numbers have not grown at the same rate as the eligible population for screening. 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.

In addition, missed appointments continue to impact numbers screened. Every appointment not filled represents lost screening time and almost 50% of all women due their first mammogram don't attend, meaning capacity and time lost when we could be screening other women.

Potential new breast screening locations

You can read about how we plan and manage breast screening invitations and appointments on our [website](#). We have introduced three additional mobile units since 2020, and as part of

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our future planning for BreastCheck, we are looking at potential screening locations with a large population where we could have another permanent screening unit and screen more women, in line with funding and available clinical staffing.

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

- **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. 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 adjusted ceiling for consultants and radiographers in 2025.
- **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.

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.

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, or by phoning [1800 45 45 55](tel:1800454555), Monday to Friday between 8am–5pm.

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.