



22 September 2025

Deputy Sorca Clarke
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Our Ref: ÁC/Communications

PQ46131/25: To ask the Minister for Health the reason BreastCheck failed to meet its annual screening targets in 2023 and 2024; her plans to ensure they meet their target in 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ46132/25: To ask the Minister for Health the total funding allocated to the BreastCheck programme in each of the years 2020-2025; the projected allocation for 2026; and her views on whether this funding is sufficient to meet the annual screening target.

PQ46133/25: To ask the Minister for Health the current number of radiographers, radiologists, breast surgeons, and triple assessment clinic staff employed by BreastCheck, compared to the number required to deliver screening and assessment to target capacity and the current number of vacancies.

PQ46134/25: To ask the Minister for Health the breakdown of BreastCheck resources, by RHA, including staff numbers, budget and access to a triple assessment clinic; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions. I propose answering them together and trust that you are happy with this approach.

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 have 4 regional BreastCheck centres – 2 in Dublin, 1 in Cork and 1 in Galway, all accredited in 2025 to the highest quality standard by EUREF, the European Reference Organisation for Quality Assured Breast Screening and Diagnostic Services. We have 24 mobile units that move between 54 locations across the country. 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.

Screening targets

The following table shows the number of women screened by BreastCheck in 2023 and 2024, and the target for both of those years.

Year	No. women screened	Target
2024	137,134	195,000
2023	166,532	185,000

Our target for 2025 is to screen 219,000 women. In the first half of 2025, we provided breast screening to 80,000 women and expect that we will screen 170,000 women this year.

There are several reasons why we have not met our screening targets in recent years, including an increase in the number of women eligible for screening which has grown almost

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20% from 524,000 in 2019, to 625,000 in 2025. This increase in the eligible population is challenging because of:

- **COVID-19 impact:** Screening time lost during the pandemic and the catch-up programme when [we offered screening to more women](#) led to some women waiting longer than the standard two years.
- **Staffing:** More women are now eligible for BreastCheck, but staffing has not grown at the same pace. Global shortages of radiology and radiography staff also affect delivery.
- **Appointment non-attendance:** Almost half of women invited for their first mammogram don't attend, meaning that despite our focused work to maximise appointment slots, valuable screening time can be lost that could be offered to others.

How we are addressing these challenges

- **Expanding our team:** Since 2023 we have recruited new consultants and senior radiographers, gained approval to fill key posts, and secured funding for further recruitment in 2025. More detail is provided below in relation to BreastCheck staffing. We are also expanding training places and advertising internationally.
- **More mobile units:** Three new [mobile screening units](#) have been added since 2020, with plans for more as funding and staffing allow.
- **Better technology:** A new patient database launched in 2024 is freeing up staff time for direct patient care. This new system has simplified and streamlined our workflows, allowing our BreastCheck team to focus more on direct patient care. In the weeks before AIRE went live, we reduced the number of screening invitations and then paused screening for two days to allow for the safe transfer of data. We are also preparing to pilot AI to continue to improve efficiency and quality.
- **Maximising appointment use:** We now send text reminders, and appointment details through the [HSE Health App](#), making it easier for women to confirm, change and consent to appointments, and helping ensure no screening slot goes unused.
- **Prioritising access:** We are focused on inviting women at higher risk, those waiting longest, newly eligible women, and [women from marginalised groups who may face barriers to screening](#).

You can read about how we plan and manage breast screening invitations and appointments on our [website](#).

Funding allocated to BreastCheck

The following table shows the BreastCheck budget for the years 2020-2025. Our budget for 2026 has not yet been determined.

Year	Budget (€)	Year	Budget (€)	Year	Budget (€)
2020	27m	2022	39.3m	2024	43.8m
2021	35.m	2023	40.6m	2025	47.9m

BreastCheck staffing

BreastCheck operates as a comprehensive breast cancer care pathway, from initial screening, to assessment, confirmation of diagnosis, and treatment. Unlike other international screening programmes, for example UK programmes, BreastCheck is responsible for the entire continuum of care of women aged between 50-69 years old. BreastCheck is a national programme, therefore we do not assign or breakdown resources by RHA.

We employ all the staff involved in delivering breast cancer screening, diagnosis and initial treatment, as follows:

Screening	Assessment	Procedures	Diagnosis	Surgery	Follow up
Radiographers Radiologists	Radiographers Radiologists HCAs	Radiographers Radiologists Nurses HCAs	Pathologists Medical Scientists Radiologists Surgeons	Surgeons Radiologists Anaesthetist Nurses	Surgeons Radiologists Nurses
Staff supporting entire breast screening participant pathway: Physicists, NCHD/Registrars Administrative Support, Scheduling, Medical Secretaries, Programme Management, and the National Screening Service supporting departments					

Please see the numbers of staff per clinical discipline in June 2025:

Staff Category		Wholetime Equivalent June 2025
Medical & Dental	Consultant Anaesthesiologist	4
	Consultant Radiologist	22
	Consultant Histopathologist	8
	Consultant General Surgeon	11
	Registrar	11
Nursing & Midwifery	Clinical Nurse Manager 2	22
Health & Social Care Professionals	Radiographer	79
	Physicist	4
	Medical Scientist, Senior	8
Patient & Client Care	Health Care Assistant	10
	Total	181

We received €2.9m funding for 22 new posts in 2025. We have recruited half of these posts and recruitment for the remainder is under way. A further 15 posts were recently approved for funding through non-pay efficiencies. We aim to seek additional posts required through New Service Development in 2026.

For clarity, these posts are for breast screening only, not for symptomatic services / breast cancer clinics / cancer centre staff, although our medical staff work split posts between screening and symptomatic or general hospitals services and are available for BreastCheck work for 50-60% of their time.



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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.

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