

15 September 2025

Deputy John McGuinness
john.mcguinness@oireachtas.ie

Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ46658/25: To ask the Minister for Health the number of checks each year by BreastCheck (details supplied); if BreastCheck prioritises the persons missed in year one for screening in year two; the way in which BreastCheck rations the resources; the way in which and when the glitch in the register came to light; if BreastCheck has a formal protocol for contacting women who need further investigation of a mammogram; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Details supplied: in relation to Breastcheck, since they have admitted that they missed their targets for two years running.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question. Please note that we regularly publish data on numbers screened in our [programme reports](#) and [activity and performance data](#). Annual screening targets are published each year in the HSE's *National Service Plan*, which is available on hse.ie.

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.

The following table shows the number of women screened by BreastCheck from 2023 to 2024, and the screening target for each of those years. Please note this is preliminary data and it is subject to verification and change.

Table 1. Numbers of women screened by BreastCheck 2023 - 2024

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

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, unattended appointments continue to impact numbers screened. Every appointment not attended 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.

Delivering breast screening 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 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. 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.

Assessment

There are 2 types of results women can get: a normal result, or an invitation for further assessment (tests). About 1 in 25 results show that more tests are needed. In line with our [BreastCheck Charter](#), we aim to offer women a follow-up assessment within 2 weeks of her abnormal screening result. These tests may include another mammogram, an ultrasound and a breast examination. Women may also have a biopsy, where we take a sample of cells from the woman's breast and check it under a microscope.

Our BreastCheck register

The majority of women do not need to self-register for BreastCheck. Most women are added to the BreastCheck register automatically through the Department of Social Protection.

We are grateful to the women who contacted us to tell us that they had entered their information on our register (self-registration) but our system was not showing that they were registered when they checked the register again. We investigated this issue immediately and found that it impacted a group of women who completed online self-registration between February and August. While we had received their information, our system was not confirming that the women were registered.

This issue arose on 27 August 2026. We put a dedicated team in place to resolve it, and it was resolved by 5 September. We have contacted the women impacted by this issue to confirm that they are on the register and provide contact points to assist them further if needed.



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

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.

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

