

BreastCheck

- To mark the beginning of **Breast Cancer Awareness Month** on 01 October, BreastCheck urged women to take up their invitation for screening. We asked women who had not had their first screening appointment to check that they are on our register at breastcheck.ie; and asked all women to let us know if they can't attend; and to learn the ways to reduce their risk of breast cancer; all at breastcheck.ie. We did this through a social media campaign; media reporting and advertorials; and a GP surgery poster and leaflet campaign. The key messages included advising women to be aware of the symptoms of breast cancer; the importance of screening to reduce the risk of breast cancer; and a reminder that screening won't find every cancer.
- We in **BreastCheck** invite all women for screening at regular intervals between the ages of 50 and 69. When breast screening was impacted by COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021, appointments were delayed by up to a year. Some women who were aged 69 and due a screening test in 2020 or 2021 may have turned 70 before we could invite them for their final screen. We are writing to these women to invite them for this screen. You can read more about this [here](#).

CervicalCheck

- **CervicalCheck** is working with our Public Health department to assess how useful self-sampling might be, what people think about it and how reliable it is as part of a screening programme. You can read more about the project [here](#).
- The **NSS's Programme Evaluation Unit** has changed its prediction for the number of screening tests CervicalCheck will carry out in 2022. Last year the unit predicted that 295,000 unique women and people with a cervix would have one or more satisfactory cervical screening tests in a primary care setting in 2022. We have now revised that figure to 261,000 women, following a predictive modelling exercise we carried out in May of this year. You can read more about this [here](#).

BowelScreen

- **BowelScreen** has begun a research project aimed at improving bowel cancer screening uptake. The CRITICALS (Creation of an Innovative Intervention for Improving Colorectal Cancer Screening) project is developing screening information materials that will be sent to a sample population of BowelScreen participants. It will then assess attitudes and participation in screening among those who received the new information, and among other BowelScreen participants who did not. The project is funded by the Irish Cancer Society's Social, Nursing, and Allied Health Sciences Post-Doctoral Fellowship. You can read more about the CRITICALS project [here](#).

Diabetic RetinaScreen (DRS)

- **DRS** is up to date with invites for screening following COVID-19. Since September 2022 all participants are being invited when they are due. This year we also expect to have our highest screening uptakes since the programme began in 2013.
- Around **18,000 people** have now joined our new two-yearly screening pathway.
- We are reporting a **high number of new registrations** from people newly diagnosed with diabetes.
- **We have created new videos in 29 languages** for people whose primary language is not English. The videos explain how people who have diabetes can use our services. The videos can be viewed by clicking [here](#).
- **In November we began piloting a new pregnancy pathway which provides extra screening for women with diabetes who become pregnant.** The pathway has received funding from the Women's Health Task Force. The pilot in the Dublin region this month, with a view to rolling this out nationally in 2023. Professor David Keegan, Clinical Director of DRS said: *"Women with diabetes who are pregnant are at higher risk of sight loss. This investment will allow a specific diabetic retinal screening pathway for patients who are pregnant. This new pathway improves equality and quality of access to eye care for women at risk of sight loss."*

Interval Cancer Report implementation

Our working groups continue to progress their specific implementation plans.

The **CervicalCheck IC Implementation Group** is continuing to design its patient-requested review and disclosure processes. The final process has been approved the Interval Cancer Steering Group and we continue to work with key stakeholders to deliver the process.

This group is collaborating with HSE Open Disclosure Office and National Healthcare Communications Programme to develop an intensive communication skills training package to support the delivery of this process.

Extensive work is ongoing to develop PRR resourcing materials for participants, clinicians and the wider public. Further to this, a communications and stakeholder engagement strategy has been developed and is being implemented.

The **BreastCheck IC Implementation Group** has focused on strengthening existing processes for patient-requested reviews. The programme continues to provide patient-requested reviews. The retention and deletion of historic educational materials under GDPR procedures has been completed. Ongoing data retention/deletion and compliance with GDPR policies and procedures is in operation. An interval cancer rate for BreastCheck up to 2016 is available and work will continue to develop the next interval cancer rate. BreastCheck continues to work with the National Cancer Registry Ireland to strengthen links between the two organisations.

The **BowelScreen IC Implementation Group** has developed and implemented a system for recording post colonoscopy colorectal cancer. A standardised colonoscopy consent form is now in use in endoscopy screening units. The memorandum of understanding between BowelScreen and the local screening units has been updated to reflect the responsibility of the local screening units in conducting and disclosing the outcomes of patient-requested reviews. The BowelScreen IC Implementation Group will continue to work closely with NCRI/NSS Data Sharing Group to support the development of processes to calculate an interval cancer rate for colorectal cancer.

The **Legal Framework Group** have developed an interim report and recommendations. This report is intended to support the work of the other Interval Cancer Implementation Groups while the commissioned research (legal benchmarking, health ethics, efficacy of screening and the cost effectiveness of screening) is ongoing, and to provide a progress update to stakeholders. This report has been approved by the Interval Cancer Steering Group and is now under consultation.

The outcome of these research projects will inform the final report in 2023.

The **Communications IC Implementation Group** has concluded its three-stage research project to support future communications work to build the public's trust and confidence in the screening programmes. The findings of this research have informed future communications work through the development and implementation of an action plan. The actions support the wider HSE's Trust and Confidence Action Plan.

NCRI report shows positive impact of cancer screening programmes

A new report published by the National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) shows the **positive impact of BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelScreen on cancer detection in Ireland**. The key findings of the report, published on 22 September, titled [Breast, cervical and colorectal cancer 1994-2019: National trends for cancers with population-based screening programmes in Ireland](#), show a noticeable increase in earlier diagnosis, and a demonstrable reduction in mortality rates. The report finds that cancers detected via screening were, on average, found at much earlier stages in the screening age groups than in the non-screening groups; decreases in mortality rates for the three cancers were, in general, more substantial in the age-groups eligible for screening; and survival is now higher and has improved more markedly in the screening age groups for all three cancers. See [here](#) for the NSS's statement on the report.

Additional Women's Health Fund investment for BowelScreen, DRS and BreastCheck

Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly TD announced an additional **€760,000 in funding** for screening services through the Women's Health Fund, on 23 September. This funding will provide investment to research low uptake in BowelScreen among women in some at-risk populations; new technologies to enable the BreastCheck programme to listen and respond to women's experiences through a real-time platform; and piloting a new national screening pathway for women with diabetes who become pregnant. The funding has enabled the programme to begin a pilot project in the Dublin region before a national roll-out next year.

Dr. Scally Final Report

The National Screening Service has welcomed the publication of Dr Gabriel Scally's final progress review of the implementation of the recommendations from his Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck screening programme. You can read our statement and access the report [here](#).

NSS strategy

Our strategy development is almost complete and we are close to publishing our roadmap for what we hope to achieve over the next five years, and how we plan to achieve it. The plan takes in the wider healthcare environment and developments in screening and population health – both in Ireland and abroad. As part of our patient-centred approach we consulted widely with our participants, staff, and screening partners to understand what goals and objectives are most important and relevant to them.

Work on the strategy development began in Q1 and the final report is due to be published early next year. The full report, including details on our mission, vision and values and our key areas of focus for the next five years will be available online.

Further information on the strategy is available from nss.strategy@screeningservice.ie

National Cervical Screening Laboratory

Significant progress is being made on the new National Cervical Screening Laboratory.

The laboratory is being developed by the HSE and the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital and is designed to be a national centre of excellence for cervical screening. It will be commissioned by Ireland's cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck, to process women's cervical screening samples. You can read more about it [here](#).

Information governance

We are continually improving our practice around **data protection and information governance** as we build an information governance framework for the NSS. Our information governance team is expanding with the addition of an Information Governance Co-Ordinator, and our progress in this important area has been recognised with a 'Highly Commended' citation in the HSE Excellence Awards 2022.

Quality, Safety and Risk

We completed a series of **risk management training across the NSS** ranging from understanding risk, project risk, to risk management workshop. We continue to embed our Quality Management Information System to support processes in all our programmes and functions. The QSR department led in the recent Dr Gabriel Scally's Implementation Review Report and assured the delivery and implementation of recommendations in a timely manner.

Programme Evaluation Unit

Our Programme Evaluation Unit provides data for internal and external stakeholders. In the second half of the year the unit has:

- Contributed to the forthcoming **BreastCheck Programme Statistical Report** and provided data for HSE and service planning.
- Collaborated with the **National Cancer Registry of Ireland** in the calculation of interval breast cancer rates which will be published with the Statistical Report.
- Aided the development of the **protocol for exchange of BowelScreen data** for interval cancer documentation.
- Provided data for **cervical elimination target modelling**.
- Published 1 peer-reviewed open access article “**Interval cancer audit and disclosure in breast screening programmes: an international survey**” and co-presented one poster at the IACR 2022 Virtual Scientific Conference.

Public Health

The **NSS's Public Health Team Activity Report 2021** outlines the team's work through 2021 and continued work into 2022 and beyond. You can read more [here](#).

Cervical Cancer Elimination

We are continuing to work on our **cervical cancer elimination strategy** in alignment with the World Health Organisation. We expect to finish our mathematical modelling in 2023 and this will enable us to set a date for elimination of cervical cancer in Ireland. Consultation on an action plan for elimination will begin in 2023.

Patient and Public Partnership

As we come to the final year of our current **Patient and Public Partnership strategy** we are working to fully embed the group's function within our operations and business, and to continue to develop our person-centred culture. A permanent Committee is being established to provide oversight and governance for the group's projects and activities across NSS. We are embedding the group in the development of our operational planning processes for 2023 and putting in place a systematic approach to setting their annual priorities.

Equity Strategic Framework

We are developing an **Equity Strategic Framework** through an advisory group made up of internal and external stakeholders. We held two co-production workshops in early November to shape the purpose and key themes of the Framework. A second workshop will take place in December. We aim to complete the Framework by summer of 2023.

Communications – Programmes and campaigns

BreastCheck

Our **BreastCheck campaign** ran from the start of October for Breast Cancer Awareness Month and included social media activity and press advertorials in national newspapers to communicate about the delay, the importance of being breast aware and how to reduce the risk of breast cancer. Many of the social media comments praised the BreastCheck service, particularly for finding their cancer early.

CervicalCheck

We ran a **multi-channel campaign** in August and September to address knowledge gaps when it comes to cervical screening, and to encourage uptake of screening.

We partnered with the Independent.ie for a series of articles that allowed us to present a range of information and addressed some of the myths around screening and cervical cancer. The partnership performed extremely well, with 35.7k views. Three articles covered:

- The importance of HPV cervical screening
- The link between HPV and cervical screening
- The screening process
- Who is at risk of cervical cancer
- Symptoms of cervical cancer

An **interview with Dr Sarah Fitzgibbon** was the basis of the third article. The articles were supported by digital and social media activity on Independent.ie

Video on demand (VOD) also ran during this time, with videos focused on ‘What is cervical screening?’, ‘How effective is HPV cervical screening’ and ‘How to book your HPV cervical screening test’. There were 1.7m impressions of the videos.

The **social media campaign ran 10 ads** during this period. The target audience was broken down into different groups, to align messages with their needs including age groups of 25-26; 27-34; 35-49; 50-65 and LGBT+. We included Q&A videos with Dr Fitzgibbon as part of the ads, to address some of the common queries that arise about cervical screening. There was high engagement with over 613k total engagements.

BowelScreen

BowelScreen social media ran from the beginning of October through to mid-November. The social media campaign had performed well in April and we wanted to increase uptake of the programme. There was good engagement with the ads, with many people encouraging others to do the test; along with questions about extending the age range past 69.

Diabetic RetinaScreen

The **social media** activity during October-December focused on addressing knowledge gaps and barriers to attending screening. We looked at specific audiences, amending the messages according to their needs. We called out specific audiences of 18-25 year olds, 65+ and parents of people with diabetes. The campaign started on 13 October for World Sight Day and ran during World Diabetes Day. The messages focused on the importance and benefits of regular screening, encouraging the target audience to register and to attend their appointment when invited.