



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

# Year End Report 2022

## National Screening Service



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# Message from the Chief Executive, National Screening Service



**I am pleased to present the 2022 end of year report for the National Screening Service (NSS).**

Following the challenges presented to us by the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020, our priority in 2022 was to continue to deliver screening safely for participants and staff. While some of our programmes returned to normal pre-covid operation, some restrictions remained within healthcare settings which continued to impact on programme capacity. During 2022, the programmes successfully achieved the maximum invitation rate compatible with a safe follow-up assessment, and treatment capacity, within the health service. We are grateful to all of our screening partners who enabled us to achieve this.

There is positive news to report about each of our programmes in 2022. In BreastCheck, two new mobile units were commissioned and commenced screening in May and June 2022, and the programme exceeded screening targets by 4.5%. In CervicalCheck, the results turnaround times returned to four-week standard, colposcopy invite times met target turnaround times, and the provision of laboratory services for the programme re-commenced at The Coombe Hospital. BowelScreen invited over 303,005 men and women to be screened which exceeded the annual target, a new research project commenced aimed at improving bowel cancer screening uptake, and planning is

ongoing to expand screening to all people aged 55 to 74. Meanwhile, Diabetic RetinaScreen is up to date with invites to screening and had the highest screening uptake since the programme began in 2013, screening over 113,000 people in 2022 and exceeding the annual target.

In 2022, the NSS continued to fully embed the Patient and Public Partnership function within our operations and business, and to develop our person-centred culture. Twenty-four patient representatives contributed to over 20 NSS projects in 2022.

The NSS aims to improve equity across all screening programmes. We know from research that barriers exist that can dissuade participation in screening. We want to work with communities to better understand these barriers and improve access to our screening programmes. In 2022, we commenced work on the development of an Equity Strategy Framework which will help create a roadmap for this important work.

Confidence in screening is critical to achieve the minimum uptake levels for screening programmes to meet their aims and improve health outcomes. In 2022, we welcomed Dr Scally's acknowledgement in his final progress review of the implementation of the recommendations from his Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck screening programme that "women can have confidence in and should take full advantage of the cervical screening programme. It has saved many women's lives and will continue to do so."

An important new report published by the National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) in 2022 shows the positive impact of BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelScreen on cancer detection in Ireland. The key findings show noticeable increases in earlier diagnosis of cancers detected via screening and decreases in mortality rates.

We are grateful for the support of an additional €760,000 in funding from the Women's Health Fund announced by the Minister for Health in 2022. This funding will provide investment: to research low uptake in BowelScreen among women in some at-risk populations; for new technologies to enable the BreastCheck programme to listen and respond to women's experiences through a real-time platform; and to pilot a new national screening pathway for women with diabetes who become pregnant; a national roll-out of this pilot initiative is expected in 2023.

Our communication campaigns in 2022 successfully increased awareness of screening and continue to focus on building trust and confidence in the programmes. Targeted campaigns focused on addressing barriers to participate in screening and the importance and benefits of regular screening.

The NSS, National Immunisation Office (NIO) and National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) joined forces in 2022 to develop a roadmap to reach global targets for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer. In early 2023, Ireland will become one of the first countries in the world to publicly declare a commitment to this global initiative.

Finally, following wide-ranging consultation and engagement with our screening participants, staff and key stakeholders, we developed our first strategy in 2022 - Choose Screening, Together we can make a Difference - which will be launched in early 2023. Thank you to our staff for their ongoing dedication to deliver safe, quality care to our participants. I look forward to working with you all and our partners to bring our ambitious strategic priorities to fruition over the next five years.

**Fiona Murphy**

Chief Executive  
National Screening Service





# Achievements in the National Screening Service

## Population screening

Population screening is a preventative strategy that aims to improve the population outcomes for the condition being screened for. Screening programmes aim to balance the benefits of screening vs the harms. A screening test is designed for people who do not have any symptoms of disease. It aims to identify those with a risk marker for a disease and ensure early treatment. Screening programmes have been proven to benefit most of the population, despite the known harms. A report published by the National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) in September 2022, shows the positive impact of BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelScreen on cancer detection in Ireland. The key findings of the report, 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 in the age groups eligible for screening:

- cancers detected via screening were found at much earlier stages;
- decreases in mortality rates for the three cancers were more substantial;
- survival is now higher and has improved more markedly for all three cancers.

## BreastCheck

- Exceeded the programme covid adjusted target by screening over 156,000 women which was 4.5% above the target.
- Two mobile units delivered, commissioned and commenced screening in May and June 2022 to facilitate screening appointments around the country.
- BreastCheck, Public Health and Pavee Point collaborated to deliver breast screening educational sessions and identify additional supports required.
- The admin restructuring project is almost complete which will enable the programme to respond in a more agile manner to the issues BreastCheck are facing around service delivery.
- The AIRE project continued to meet all project milestones and remains on schedule. AIRE (Assessment Information Record and Evaluation) is a programme-wide IT solution capable of supporting screening participants through a range of clinical, operational and management processes.
- The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) is carrying out research to learn more about the relationship between breast density and breast cancer in Ireland. The programme is working with the RCSI on this research. The research will help BreastCheck understand if breast density has a role in breast screening in Ireland.
- BreastCheck marked Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October with a campaign encouraging women who have never had a breast screen to check the register and take up their invitations.
- BreastCheck was nominated for the Irish Healthcare Awards. The programme was nominated in the equality initiative of the year category.



## CervicalCheck

- The results turnaround times which had been affected since 2018 returned to four-week standard in early 2022. National follow-up colposcopy invite times also met the target turnaround times.
- Successful re-contracting of 95% of primary care GPs who provide a cervical screening service with almost 120 requests for new contracts.
- Dr Scally's final progress review of the implementation of the recommendations from his Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck screening programme was published in November. The HSE and NSS accepted in full, without exception, the recommendations from Dr Scally's Scoping Inquiry into CervicalCheck, and embraced the changes required to improve screening services. Dr. Scally acknowledged in his report that, 'women can have confidence in and should take full advantage of the cervical screening programme. It has saved many women's lives and will continue to do so.'
- Continued to design and plan for the Personal Cervical Screening Review process which will allow women who are diagnosed with cervical cancer and who have previously attended screening to have their screening care reviewed.
- Published the CervicalCheck Programme Report 2017-March 2020 in April 2022. It provides a statistical overview of the final years of Ireland's cytology-based population screening programme, which ended on 30 March 2020 with the advent of HPV cervical screening.
- The NSS, National Immunisation Office (NIO) and National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) joined forces to develop Ireland's roadmap to reach global targets for the elimination of cervical cancer. Modelling work is already under way on setting Ireland's specific target date to reach elimination, and this will be unveiled in 2023 along with Ireland's roadmap for achieving the goal of eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem in Ireland.

- 15 QI Portfolio projects have been completed to support the implementation of Strategic Plan 2021-2024 including approval to proceed with new Information Management System from eHealth and DGOU following completion of a rigorous business case.
- Work completed during the year on a LGBT+ cervical screening study was shortlisted for an Equality Initiative of the Year award at the Irish Healthcare Awards.
- Completion of the Education Strategy & Standards and a suite of webinars hosted with excellent attendances.

## BowelScreen

- Invited over 303,005 men and women to be screened which was above the annual target. More than 125k FIT kits were completed which was the highest number since the programme commenced.
- Launched a new service in the endoscopy unit at Mayo University Hospital to provide colonoscopy services for BowelScreen participants in the Mayo region who have been referred for further investigation.
- Adoption and implementation of the British Society of Gastroenterology / Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland / Public Health England post-polypectomy and post-colorectal cancer resection surveillance guidelines to ensure alignment across current clinical and surveillance practice in screening and symptomatic services.
- Successfully delivered the scheduled Internal Quality Audit (IQA) programme plans in 2022.
- Published the BowelScreen Programme Report 2018-2019 Round Three in April. The results clearly indicate that BowelScreen makes a significant difference to the health of the people of Ireland.

- Implemented recommendations 1,3,4,5 and 6 from the BowelScreen Expert Reference Group (ERG) Interval Cancer Report and the programme will monitor these going forward. Recommendation 2 is being managed and implemented by the NCRI/ NSS strategic planning group in 2023-24.
- Acted as the pilot programme for the development of Patient reported experience measures (PREMs) Proof of Concept Project. The programme achieved an overall Net Promotor Score of 74.2%.
- Commenced the procurement process for the laboratory analysis of FIT Kits.
- Completed the insourcing procurement exercise via the Dynamic Purchasing System on behalf of participating BowelScreen hospitals to conduct surveillance scopes by way of weekend insourcing in 2023.
- Planning is ongoing to begin expanding bowel screening to all people aged 55 to 74 as part of our commitment in Ireland's National Cancer Strategy.
- Commenced research projects that will inform on behaviours and attitudes which included creation of an innovative intervention for improving uptake.

## 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. The programme screened over 113,000 clients this year exceeding the annual target and had the highest screening uptake since the programme began in 2013.
- The first full year of the 2-yearly screening pathway is now complete with approx. 18,000 people having joined the new pathway. Early evaluation indicates that the preliminary results are positive.
- There is a high number of new registrations from people newly diagnosed with diabetes.
- Began piloting the pregnancy pathway which will provide extra screening for women with diabetes who become pregnant. The pilot, which received funding from the Women's Health Fund, began in the east of the country in November, before being rolled out nationally in 2023.
- Completed the re-tendering of the Diabetic RetinaScreen screening service at the end of 2022 with the completion of the tender competition and the award of the contract.
- Re-built the Diabetic RetinaScreen programme team through a proactive recruitment and retention process.
- 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.



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## Staff development

The NSS recognises that our staff are our most important resource and their ongoing dedication to deliver safe, quality care to our participants is invaluable. The NSS is committed to creating an environment where our staff feel valued.

### • Organisational Development

- The multiyear Organisational Development project supports the development of individuals and teams to maximise potential, capacity, engagement and culture. In 2022, it focused on staff development and retention, culture development and succession planning.
- Human Resources established a staff working group to plan around the results of the Your Opinion Counts – HSE Staff Survey 2021. The group includes representation from BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, Programme Evaluation Unit, Strategy Business and Projects, Information Communication Technology and Human Resources. The working group established a plan and recommendations; engagement with Corporate Management Team has supported ongoing implementation.
- A revised HSE Dignity at Work Policy for the Public Health Service was published in August 2022. The changes to the policy were influenced by findings from staff surveys on bullying and harassment in the workplace, and the resulting reports and recommendations. Local briefing sessions for NSS management and staff were developed by the HR team with an emphasis on practical day-to-day advice and guidance. The roll-out of these sessions will be made available to staff from January 2023.

### • Academic Study Sponsorship Scheme

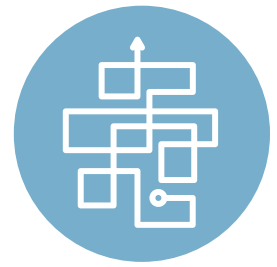
- The HR department established the Academic Study Sponsorship scheme in 2018 to provide funding support for staff to undertake third level academic study to support their roles and career progression within the NSS.
- During 2022, 12 staff members have accessed the scheme, in areas of postgraduate study such as: Public Health, Nursing Education, Leadership & Management, and Data Protection and Privacy.

### • NSS Recruitment Summary

- Staff recruitment is key for many priority areas across the NSS programmes and departments. Fully resourced teams are essential to ensure the NSS can deliver screening to approx. 2 million eligible people in Ireland.
- In 2022, the challenge of recruiting skilled staff in a very competitive environment continued.
- The recruitment team had a very successful year with the recruitment to 32 New Service Development posts, 55 replacement posts and 3 consultant posts.



# Challenges in Screening



## COVID-19

- All the National Screening Service programmes continued to be operational throughout 2022, with some returning to normal (pre-covid) operation with participants being offered screening appointments within screening timelines. In 2022, the priority for the NSS was to continue to deliver screening safely for both participants and staff. While some of the restrictions that were imposed as a response to COVID-19 were lifted, others remained within healthcare settings. Consequently in some programmes, these restrictions continued to impact capacity. Throughout the year the programmes successfully achieved the maximum invitation rate compatible with a safe follow-up assessment, and the treatment capacity within the health service. The NSS closely monitored the impact of COVID infections in the community and subsequently on hospitals. The programmes continuously reviewed service user pathways and identified any areas where there was potential for delay in accessing treatment and relaying screening results. Communication with participants and stakeholders was central to managing the safe delivery of screening services. Information was provided through our programme websites, information online, social and digital media platforms.

## BreastCheck

- BreastCheck continues to recover from the delays due to covid restrictions and the programme remains a year behind schedule. The programme is managing the number of invitations in line with programme capacity levels. There are gradual improvements to return to previous scheduling and invitations continue to be sent to women who turned 69 in 2020/21 and may have missed their final screen.

## CervicalCheck

- CervicalCheck and The Coombe Hospital continued to work closely together to resume laboratory services in 2022. CervicalCheck managed the delivery of screening to approx. 290,000 clients with a single provider for all of 2022. To ensure a resilience service provision it is important for the programme to have two laboratory service providers. Provision of laboratory services for CervicalCheck re-commenced at the NCSL in December 2022 following a validation process. In 2023, CervicalCheck and the NCSL will implement the plan to increase the number of samples processed.

## BowelScreen

- BowelScreen continued to work closely with the participating endoscopy units to return to pre-2020 levels of activity. However, as a result of Covid-19 particularly in Q1, BowelScreen endoscopy units were at reduced capacity. Clinical staff shortages were reported from within some units reporting endoscopy rolling closures throughout the year. BowelScreen closely monitored capacity within the 15 endoscopy units and managed invitations to maximise all available appointments. The programme continued to focus on prioritising the invitation of clients who have been waiting longest.

## Diabetic RetinaScreen (DRS)

- DRS continues to work closely with treatment clinics nationally to manage backlogs and assist in reducing delayed appointments. Specific challenges remain in the Southwest area. Whilst additional resources and capacity have been sourced, further work is required to support the long-term continuity of service to the region.

## Recruitment and retention of staff

- The recruitment and retention of staff particularly specialist clinical staff is complex and difficult. A shortage of specialty staff such as radiologists, histopathologists, medical scientists and radiographers is a global challenge with an insufficient number of skilled professionals available to take up vacancies. The timeframe for recruiting and filling a consultant vacancy can be long and impact service delivery. In some part workforce challenges are also related to the legal environment which increases the risk for litigation in a very high-volume service. The NSS continues to manage the challenge associated with recruitment and retention with workforce planning a key element of the NSS Strategy in conjunction with wider HSE workforce plans and it is hoped the agreement of the new consultant contract may also make a positive difference. The longer-term solutions will likely lie in technology advances such as AI and in workforce developments such as skill mix.

## Legal environment

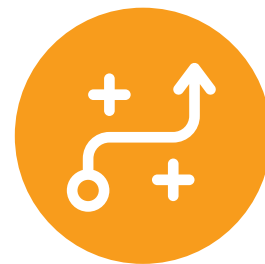
- The NSS has maintained a risk on the HSE Risk Register relating to the legal environment which risks the viability of current and future screening programmes. The current NSS risk on the HSE risk register states: *“there is a risk that an increase in mortality and morbidity will arise within the population if population-based screening programmes become unviable and services cease due to challenges in the legal environment and the uncertainty this has produced for internal and external stakeholders.”*

## Coverage/uptake

- As a population-based intervention, high coverage is vital for the success of any screening programme. With over 2 million people in Ireland eligible for at least one screening programme, confidence in screening is critical to achieve the minimum uptake levels for screening programmes to meet their aims and improve health outcomes. The NSS has a proactive approach to engaging and communicating with participants; ongoing support is essential to ensure key messages are heard.



# NSS Strategy



One of the National Screening Service's key objectives in 2022 was to develop a strategy that will set our direction for the next five years. The strategy development began in Q1 led by the Strategy Business and Projects Team and continued across the spring and summer months. In order to deliver the project requirements, a six-phase approach was applied to facilitate a comprehensive review of the current environment and arrive at considered and implementable goals and objectives to guide the NSS's efforts over the next five years.

Consultation was the longest phase of the strategy development process. In total, 19 NSS senior managers were engaged through 1:1 consultations, and 29 external stakeholders were engaged through 1:1, group or written submissions. As part of a wider staff engagement, 65 participants attended the *A Day to Have Your Say* Workshops and 130 staff participated in the *Values and Behaviours* Workshops. Consultation included representatives from the Department of Health, various HSE departments, advocacy groups, academia, Public and Patient Partner representatives, screening partners, and NSS staff. The process recognised the importance of staff and the wider stakeholders as we chart our course together. Further engagement workshops were held in autumn and winter to draft the strategy and the accompanying implementation plan. The NSS Strategy is due for publication in Q1, 2023.



# Operational Plan



- The NSS Operational Plan sets out the high level aims for 2022. The plan incorporated ongoing multi-annual projects and initiatives from 2021, in addition to the strategic and operational objectives set for 2022. The goals of trust, involvement and governance continue to be central to operational delivery in 2022.
- The NSS Operational Plan 2022 includes 94 projects/initiatives across four programmes and nine functions. Initiatives included short-term, medium-term and multi-year developments.
- By the end of 2022, the NSS had completed 37 initiatives, with 31 continuing to deliver against expected timelines. 9 projects are categorised as at risk due to external dependencies and 2 projects have been formally deferred.

## Highlights

- **National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL)** project has developed a new bespoke laboratory designed for use as a national 'Centre of Excellence' for cervical screening. The NCSL, which began construction in Jan 2021, finished its building works programme in Oct 2022, passing all required building inspections. Provision of laboratory services for CervicalCheck recommenced at The Coombe Hospital in December 2022. Workforce recruitment and training remains the key limiting factor for full establishment of the laboratory in the immediate term. A workforce plan is in place with essential roles identified. It is anticipated that it will take a number of years before the laboratory is in a position to be the principal provider of laboratory services for CervicalCheck. The NCSL project to build, equip and operationalise the new laboratory will conclude in Q1 2023.
- **BreastCheck AIRE (Assessment Information Record and Evaluation)** is a programme-wide IT solution capable of supporting screening participants through a range of clinical, operational and management processes. The system will replace BreastCheck's original IT software, which is over 20 years old. All project milestones are being met and the vendor remains on project schedule. The migration process is being progressed and training will begin Q2, 2023 with final go live scheduled for Q4, 2023.

- **The Interval cancer project:** In October 2020, the HSE welcomed the publication of the Expert Reference Groups (ERG) Interval Cancer Reports. The ERG reports proposed a suite of recommendations across all three cancer screening programmes. The Interval cancer (IC) project continued the implementation of the Expert Reference Group’s recommendations on the interval cancer audits throughout 2022 with all implementation groups continuing to progress their project plans and deliverables. Progress in 2022 included;
  - The CervicalCheck IC Implementation Group continued to focus largely on the design and implementation of patient-requested review processes. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and ancillary documents for patient-requested review process has been developed and approved.
  - The BowelScreen IC Implementation Group developed and implemented a system for recording post colonoscopy colorectal cancer (PCCRC). A standardised colonoscopy consent form has been operationalised across all local endoscopy screening units. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between BowelScreen and the local screening units has been updated to reflect the responsibility of the screening units in conducting and disclosing the outcomes of patient-requested reviews.
  - The BreastCheck IC Implementation Group focused on strengthening existing processes for patient-requested reviews. The BreastCheck programme continued to provide patient-requested reviews in line with the agreed SOP. The retention and deletion of historic educational materials under GDPR procedures has been completed and compliance with GDPR policies and procedures is in full operation. An updated interval cancer rate for breast cancer screening was calculated during Year 2 of this project.
  - The Communications IC Implementation Group concluded its 32 point action plan informed by the findings of its large-scale public attitudes research to support future communications work to build the public’s trust and confidence in the screening programmes.
  - The Legal Framework Group developed an interim report while awaiting the outcome of the commissioned research to support the work of the parallel Interval Cancer Implementation Groups. Research in the areas of law, health ethics and efficacy of screening is near completion. Research on the cost effectiveness of screening has commenced.
  - During 2022, the NSS, DOH, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), part of the World Health Organisation, formed a collaboration to prepare strategic guidance on best practices related to cervical cancer screening implementation. Three working groups along with a stakeholder advisory group were established to progress the initiative. The outcome of the working groups considerations was presented to a Stakeholder Advisory Group on 22 July 2022 in Trinity College Dublin. The IARC team is refining the three working group reports based on the feedback received at this meeting. It is anticipated that the final outcome of the collaboration will be published in Q2 2023.
  - You can read the Interval Cancer project end of year progress report in full [here](#).



# An Equitable Service



The NSS aims to address inequitable access to, or experience of, screening. Year-on-year we strive to work with communities to enable greater access to screening programmes. In 2022, the NSS undertook a variety of projects to improve access to our services and improve the outcomes for people who use our service; a sample of these are outlined here. We want to ensure that every step of the screening journey, from invitation to treatment, is accessible. We are learning and listening to communities; using this information to improve people's outcomes and experiences of screening.

## Equity Strategic Framework

- The NSS is developing a Strategic Framework to improve equity in screening in partnership with an advisory group made up of internal and external stakeholders. Initial planning and consultation workshops with the Advisory Group are complete. Consultations, with stakeholders from across the wider NSS and those from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors, will take place in early 2023. The Public Health team aim to complete the Framework by summer of 2023.

## Cervical Cancer Elimination strategy

- A strategic partnership between NIO, NCCP, NCRI and NSS has been established to work towards elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem in Ireland, aligned to the World Health Organisation (WHO) strategy. The NSS expect that the mathematical modelling will be finished in 2023 and this will enable a date to be set for elimination of cervical cancer in Ireland. The development of Ireland's roadmap to cervical cancer elimination is complete which shows the strides made so far towards this global goal, and signposts the future direction we will take, breaking this ambitious journey into achievable stages. The roadmap will be launched in January and consultation on an action plan for elimination will begin in 2023.

## Patient and Public Partnership strategy

- The PPP strategy exists to ensure the NSS works in partnership with patients and public, involving them in decision making and making sure we are working towards providing person-centred care. In 2022, the NSS continued to fully embed the group's function within our operations and business, and to continue to develop our person-centred culture. Twenty-four patient representatives contributed to over 20 NSS projects, including the Cervical Cancer Expert Reference Group and the Interval Cancer project. A permanent Committee has been established to provide oversight and governance for the group's projects and activities across the NSS. Patient and Public Partnership (PPP) Strategy 2019-2023: Mid-way Progress Report detailing progress made on implementing the strategic actions in the PPP strategy was published in June.



# Research and Development



The NSS Programme Evaluation Unit's (PEU) core work is data provision, analysis and interpretation for the four screening programmes, and for key internal and external stakeholders.

## Research and quality assurance

- Contributed to the publication of BowelScreen and CervicalCheck Programme Reports and the BreastCheck Programme Statistical Report
- Published four peer-reviewed articles, and presented seven posters at three international conferences between November 2021–2022 with the award of best prize at the British Society of Colposcopy & Cervical Pathology international conference
- Continued to provide data for HSE and service planning.

## Development of superior data collection and provision

- Collaborated with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland in the calculation of interval breast cancer rates which have been published with the Statistical Report
- Aided the development of the protocol for exchange of BowelScreen data with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland for interval cancer documentation
- Development of data quality statement for BreastCheck data

- Contribution to the new BreastCheck AIRE system
- Cervical screening data reporting improvements
- Acquisition of Tableau for dashboard provision
- Provided data for cervical elimination target modelling.

## The four PEU peer-reviewed articles published in 2022 are:

1. Fitzpatrick P et al. Interval cancer audit and disclosure in breast screening programmes: An international survey. *Journal of Medical Screening*. 2023;30(1); 36-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09691413221122014>
2. Kelly C et al. (2022). Screen-detected ductal carcinoma in situ, 2008-2020: An observational study. *J Med Screen*. 2022 Sep;29(3):172-177. <https://doi:10.1177/09691413221090739>
3. O' Donovan B et al. Trust and cancer screening: effects of a screening controversy on women's perceptions of cervical cancer screening. *Preventive Medicine Reports* (online 27 December 2021,101684)
4. Fitzpatrick P et al. Interval cancer audit and disclosure in cervical screening programmes: An international survey. *Journal of Medical Screening*. 2022;29(2):104-109. doi:10.1177/09691413211062344 PMID: 34894859

# Communications, Inclusion, and Trust



The NSS communications team has continued to focus on building trust this year. The team continue to work closely with Public Health to embed the drivers of trust – intent, respect, inclusion, integrity, competence, openness and fairness – in NSS communications.

## International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)

The NSS, DOH, and IARC, part of the World Health Organisation, have formed a collaboration to prepare strategic guidance on best practices related to cancer screening implementation. The key communications aim is to emphasise good practices including a checklist for transparent and pragmatic communication with the public, participants and other stakeholders.

- An IARC communications working group report, 'Effective and Transparent Communication in Cervical Screening', has been prepared to support the development of an international best practice guide to screening programme communications.

## National survey

The team completed a 32-point communications action plan resulting from the 2021 large-scale behaviours and attitudes research – including actions such as creating, operating and evaluating a proactive media strategy in 2022; creating new information in tandem with our PPP for women on how to reduce their own risk of breast cancer; and piloting an information hub within NSS.

## Information Hub

The Communications and Public Health Departments continued to work together to enhance how communications content is developed and communicated to NSS audiences. The Hub is using evidence-based, standardised approaches to develop communications content, with a focus on being patient/ service-user centred. Engaging subject matter experts, patients/ service users, applying behavioural insights expertise and plain English guidelines are all part of the new processes being applied. The pilot of the Information Hub function is now complete and recommendations from an external evaluation of the Hub are being taken on board. New Hub processes are now being applied across NSS. Other Information Hub updates:

- Blog training was organised by the Information Hub team to enhance the confidence and skills of NSS staff who want to write about their work and have it published on the NSS website.
- A review of CervicalCheck and DRS letters and leaflets was completed with engagement with Subject Matter Experts and the Public and Patient Partnership group.
- The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) was procured to provide behavioural insights expertise. Engaging with the ESRI enabled the Hub team to both build an understanding of how to embed behavioural insights into processes and to upskill on the principles and practice of behavioural insights.

## NSS corporate website

The Communications team are developing a new NSS corporate website to provide news and updates on screening to the public, media, elected representatives, healthcare professionals and researchers at home and abroad. The research with users has been completed to help plan the concept and content of the website and a website framework was developed.

## Campaigns

- A new CervicalCheck radio ad campaign launched in March, focusing on women and people with a cervix aged 50-65, women over 50, and 25- to 65-year-olds in certain counties that have low uptake of HPV cervical screening.
- April was Bowel Cancer Awareness Month and BowelScreen had campaign activity across radio, press ads and social media. The aim of the campaign was to increase knowledge around bowel screening and address barriers to doing the test, encouraging 60- to 69-year-olds to participate in screening.
- 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.
- The DRS campaign started on 13 October for World Sight Day and ran during World Diabetes Day on 14 November. The messages focused on the importance and benefits of regular screening, encouraging the target audience to register and to attend their appointment when invited. The social media activity during October-December focused on addressing knowledge gaps and barriers to attending screening.

## What our participants told us

### BreastCheck

*“I have nothing but praise for the system. I attended my appointment and received my results within a week.”*

### Diabetic RetinaScreen

*“Engage with Diabetic RetinaScreen. Sign up for it and go to your appointments. It’s important – don’t miss them.”*

### BowelScreen

*“When you get to the age of 60, make sure to do the test – if I hadn’t done it, I wouldn’t be here.”*

### CervicalCheck

*“Cervical screening only takes a few minutes, is painless and could save your life. It saved mine. So please get it done”*

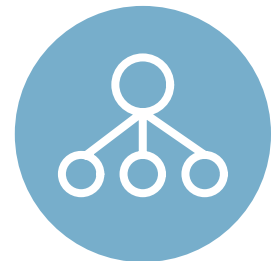
# Information Technology



**In 2022, the Information Communication Technology (ICT) team achieved key goals to support the four programmes to deliver screening services and the nine departments across the NSS.**

- 2022 saw the completion of the rollout of laptops/desktops to satisfy remote working and Windows 10 requirements, which included the migration of over 450 endpoints to Windows 10. The rollout of Office 365 was also completed with all NSS staff converted to O365 environment with features available such as SharePoint, MS Teams, and new Office environments.
- A robust ICT Security Review took place in 2022 following the 2021 cyber-attack on the HSE to form the basis for process improvements and enhancements to the Cyber Security stance of the NSS.
- The ICT Team has devised an ICT Strategy for 2022-2024 to develop existing and proposed projects based on defined priorities from the screening programmes, and the underlying ICT infrastructure for the wider organisation. An implementation plan will follow in early 2023.

# Governance



**Ensuring robust governance continues to be a key focus of the NSS and is one of our three interim operational goals for 2022. Many departments have successfully implemented initiatives to help strengthen the governance structures.**

- Quality, Safety and Risk (QSR) department completed staff-driven training to strengthen risk management in the NSS, which is aligned with the HSE Integrated Risk Management Policy. The training ranged from understanding risk, project risk, to risk management workshop which will enable the NSS to continue to embed the Quality Management Information System to support processes in all the programmes and functions. Other QSR led initiatives include:
  - Shared learning processes have been put in place to help establish a consistent approach to organisation-wide learning from incidents, as recommended by the HSE Incident Management Framework.

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- 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.
  - A gap analysis was conducted by the programmes against the new NSS Quality Assurance (QA) Policy Framework and the operating models drafted outlining QA Practices. A cross-programme workshop was held to identify shared opportunities and potential improvements have been identified.
  - Information governance department is continually improving the practice around data protection and information governance as the team build an information governance framework for the NSS to improve transparency and accountability around how the NSS process personal data. In 2022, an Information Governance Manager and an Information Governance Co-Ordinator were recruited to strengthen controls around information management. The progress in this important area was recognised with a ‘Highly Commended’ citation in the HSE Excellence Awards 2022.
  - NSS Public Health department joined with 221+ group representatives to co-design a consultation process with the wider 221+ group to learn from their experiences to improve reviews of cervical cancer cases and accompanying disclosure process. The consultation process arose from the publication by the HSE of the ERGs’ interval cancer reports in October 2020. The NSS has been working towards the implementation of the reports’ recommendations, by designing a process for a Personal Cervical Screening Review (PCSR).
  - 2022 saw the continued growth of the Complaints and Compliance Team in Client Services. The team have implemented changes across the NSS to increase compliance with the Ombudsman’s Learning to Get Better recommendations in relation to sign-posting the pathway for service users to provide feedback to the organisation, and YSYS training is now included on the induction programme for all new staff. In addition, feedback casebooks have been submitted to the HSE every quarter in 2022 and the implementation of Your Service Your Say (YSYS) processes and standards across the NSS point of contact email pathways for service users has commenced. Complaints & Compliance have also taken up membership on the steering group responsible for the continued development of the mandatory national complaints management system.
  - Client Services continues to design and implement processes and standards for the delivery of Personal Cervical Screening Reviews. The department has also completed a number of ‘slide retrieval exercises’ throughout the year. The success of this project has ensured the return of a significant number of cytology slides that were outstanding with Independent Reviewers back to their laboratory of origin. Client Services has also worked closely with HSE Procurement Services to prioritise the implementation of a dedicated CRM E-discovery system in 2023.
  - The HR and Finance departments successfully completed the 2022 payroll project which comprised of a series of payroll audits and strengthening of segregation of duties both internally in HR and with the Finance Department. Robust structures between HR and Payroll/ Finance NSS have been set up, including work groups, to ensure accurate and timely processing of HR and Payroll data.

# The Year Ahead



The HSE National Service Plan 2023 and the NSS Strategy summarises the priority areas for the National Screening Service in the year ahead. At NSS level, these priorities include the implementation of a strategy for the NSS that will establish the strategic direction and guide future stakeholder engagement and partnerships. Key objectives include:

- Implement the Communication, Engagement and Information Development hub to provide a user centred and standardised approach
- Continue the implementation of recommendations arising from the Interval Cancer Expert Reference Group Reports
- Continue the phased implementation of the NSS Quality Assurance Policy Framework to strengthen quality assurance across all four programmes
- Publish an Equity Strategy Framework that will establish the direction for addressing screening inequalities for the next five years and maximise screening
- Continue the phased implementation of a patient-reported experience programme across the four programmes
- Align with forthcoming updated EU Council recommendation on cancer screening
- Commence the development of a 10 year workforce plan to ensure long term workforce resilience.

At programme level some of the priority areas for action include:

## BreastCheck

- Increase capacity within the BreastCheck programme to re-align service delivery with the key performance indicators defined in the BreastCheck Women's Charter
- Continue implementation of the new client and radiology information system of the BreastCheck service to ensure the efficient clinical and operational administration of the BreastCheck service
- Plan and implement a real-time digital patient experience survey to enable BreastCheck to capture and understand women's experiences in the programme and identify opportunities for improvement
- Continue procurement for the replacement of the 16 mobile vans, the X-ray equipment on board and the equipment for static units.

## CervicalCheck

- Continue the multi-year collaboration with the National Immunisation Office, the National Cancer Control Programme and the National Cancer Registry Ireland to progress baseline modelling and structures in preparation for Ireland setting a target for the elimination of cervical cancer
- Develop a new information management system to support the complexity of programme operations and delivery. Finalisation of business and technical requirements and procurement in 2023



- Undertake research to explore beliefs and attitudes regarding self-sampling for cervical screening in Ireland to inform potential ways to improve access to screening
- Support the further establishment of the National Cervical Screening Laboratory at The Coombe Hospital
- Commence phase 1 of the Personal Cervical Screening Review project before full implementation later in the year
- Organise a colposcopy conference in May 2023 for colposcopy and wider gynaecology colleagues.

## BowelScreen

- Expand the age range for BowelScreen by one year to include those aged 59 (programme age range aim to extend from 59-69 in line with the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026)
- Expand current research on women's experience of the BowelScreen programme to determine why certain groups of the population may not engage with bowel cancer screening
- Quality Improvement: Review of the programme quality standards will continue to include development of the programmes IT system to facilitate this
- Utilise the EU Horizon grant to undertake the Micro-AI-ome project as co-investigators to determine the effectiveness of the microbiome signal in clinical practice as a primary tool for CRC screening

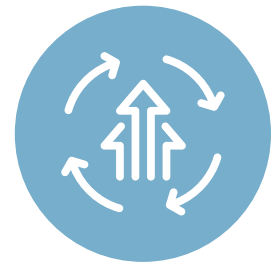
- Enhance and redevelop the surgery and neoadjuvant modules on the COR database
- Complete a procurement exercise via the Dynamic Purchasing System on behalf of participating BowelScreen laboratories for a telepathology system as a quality initiative that is compatible between sites to allow for sharing of images.

## Diabetic RetinaScreen

- Begin a pilot programme towards implementing a screening pathway for women with diabetes who become pregnant, and to inform a future application to the National Screening Advisory Committee
- Continue the Digital Surveillance Pilot Pathway into 2023 and review the efficacy of extending the scope of the programme.



# Conclusion



**In 2022, the priority in the NSS was to continue to deliver screening safely for participants and staff. The National Screening Service continued to work towards increasing sustainable capacity, with programmes successfully achieving the maximum invitation rate compatible with a safer follow-up assessments and treatment capacity within the health service. Funding for new service developments and the Women’s Health Fund enabled the NSS to invest in new projects, new research and new technologies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the programmes.**

The findings of a new NCRI report in 2022 were encouraging, showing increases in earlier diagnosis of cancers detected via screening with decreases also in mortality rates; and it was reassuring to read Dr Scally’s assessment of the NSS and CervicalCheck in 2022 and of the progress made to improve services for women.

An exciting year lies ahead in 2023 as we align ourselves globally with the World Health Organisation’s initiative to eliminate cervical cancer. The first National Screening Service Strategic Plan will be launched, and work on improving equity in the screening programmes will see the publication of a new Equity Strategy Framework. The NSS looks forward to continuing the work with partners, stakeholders, and the Patient and Public Partnership to continue to develop a person-centred culture across the screening services.





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