



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

National Screening Service

# Improving Equity in Screening

## ACTION PLAN 2024-2025



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# Introduction

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We know that some of the population groups that don't participate in screening are the same ones that have a higher incidence of disease<sup>1</sup>. People can experience barriers at any point on the screening pathway and we are working to better understand and address these barriers. We want all eligible people to understand what screening is and to participate in screening if they want to.

In [Improving equity in screening: A strategic framework 2023-2027](#) we have set out how we can understand and aim to improve equity in our screening programmes. Our framework identifies five priority areas through which we aim to understand and address inequities in our service delivery. These areas are as follows:



This high-level action plan outlines the strategic, organisational and cross-programme actions we will take during 2024 and 2025 as we continue to implement our framework. The plan has been developed in collaboration with our Equity Oversight Committee and Patient and Public Partnership (PPP) representatives.

This plan supports the work already under way across the NSS to improve health equity. This ongoing work includes partnering with relevant organisations and community groups, conducting research and implementing research recommendations, delivering education and training and developing accessible communications resources. Our [NSS digital platform](#) on the NSS website captures details of these projects.

The actions in this plan are predominantly cross-programme projects involving our four screening programmes: BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen. Associated with each action is a lead, partner/s and a timeframe. Some actions will also require engagement with external partners and stakeholders.

The implementation and delivery of the Equity Framework and Equity Action Plan is being overseen by the Equity Oversight Committee. The committee reports on progress to the NSS corporate and executive management teams. The committee comprises patient representatives and staff from our four screening programmes and our departments.

We will develop a second action plan for 2026 and 2027. A mid-way progress report on this action plan will be published in early 2026. We will commission an external evaluation of the strategic framework in 2028 to determine its impact.

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1 NCRI's report on Cancer Inequalities in Ireland by deprivation, 2004-2018 and also Clarke N, McNamara D, Kearney PM, O'Morain CA, Shearer N, Sharp L. The role of area-level deprivation and gender in participation in population-based faecal immunochemical test (FIT) colorectal cancer screening. *Prev Med.* 2016;93:198-203.

# Priorities from the Strategic Framework to Improve Equity in Screening

## 1. Research and data

**Overview:** We will take an evidence-based approach to our work in improving equity in screening, conducting research, gathering feedback, identifying opportunities for capturing equity-related data and reviewing our work.

### Our focus areas

- 1.1 Ensure we stay up to date with evidence of equity in screening by: (a) reviewing available research, data, and epidemiological analyses, and (b) conducting qualitative and quantitative research.
- 1.2 Work to ensure that all equity projects are based on the best, comprehensive, and evaluated evidence.
- 1.3 Share data, research, and learnings with relevant stakeholders through a robust information sharing process to support action in under-screened communities, for example with HSE Health Regions.
- 1.4 Agree on robust equity and screening monitoring, evaluation and reporting guidelines and practice. This may include, but is not limited to, the following elements: a. agree a minimum set of equity stratifiers and comply with the recording of ethnic identifiers; b. partnership involvement; c. monitor and evaluate this framework.
- 1.5 Use service level, user experience evidence and equity tools to tailor processes to improve and modify screening programmes.

### Actions

No.	Action	NSS Lead	Key NSS Partners	Timeframe
1a	Improve the measurement of equity in screening through the analysis of equity stratifiers, such as area level deprivation	Public Health	Programme Evaluation Unit, and programmes*	2024-2025
1b	Monitor the outcomes of the strategic framework to improve equity in screening	Public Health	Programme Evaluation Unit	2024-2025

\* 'Programmes' refers to our four screening programmes; BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen.

## 2. Education, learning and development

**Overview:** Enhancing the education, learning and development needs of HSE staff, screening providers and other stakeholders is essential. This may be done through raising awareness of existing information resources or the development of new resources, if necessary.

### Our focus areas

- 2.1** Support NSS staff and screening providers to build their knowledge, awareness and understanding of avoidable barriers (inequities) that people may experience in screening services.
- 2.2** Contribute to raising awareness of the NSS supports and interventions that aim to improve access to screening services.
- 2.3** Identify, understand and, where possible, address the educational and training needs of different stakeholders in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors.
- 2.4** Ensure that our education, learning and development resources are appropriate and accessible.
- 2.5** Identify and enhance opportunities for shared learning with existing and relevant health training and education programmes – within and beyond the HSE.

### Actions

No.	Action	NSS Lead	Key NSS Partners	Timeframe
2a	Conduct a learning needs analysis on the understanding of equity in screening among NSS staff and screening providers	Public Health	Programmes* and Programme Evaluation Unit	2024
2b	Develop an education, learning and development plan for NSS staff and screening providers regarding equity in screening	Public Health	Programmes and Communications Engagement and Information Development	2024
2c	Deliver the education, learning and development plan (related to action 2b)	Public Health	Programmes and departments	2025

\* 'Programmes' refers to our four screening programmes; BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen.

## 3. Partnership

**Overview:** NSS is not alone in wanting to improve health equity. Through a partnership approach, we can build capacity, capability, and potential. We will apply the principles and practice of an appropriate model of partnership in this work, for example, a community development approach.

### Our focus areas

- 3.1 Continue to collaborate and invest in partnerships with organisations, community leaders and structures representing never screened or under-screened populations to understand and meet their needs.
- 3.2 Consider new and creative partnership approaches that may enhance screening participation, for example a single register for screening.
- 3.3 Strengthen our engagement with regional and national partners to ensure that we are maximising connectivity, reducing duplication of effort, and creating efficiencies.
- 3.4 Continue to strengthen international partnerships to ensure that we are aware of best practice knowledge (including data), developments, strategies, and initiatives.
- 3.5 Continue to adhere to, report on and implement relevant policies and legislation at an organisational level.

### Actions

No.	Action	NSS Lead	Key NSS Partners	Timeframe
3a	Collaborate with health regions to improve equity in screening via strategic partnerships, sharing screening data and tools/resources to improve equity in screening	Public Health	Programmes*, Programme Evaluation Unit, Communications, Engagement and Information Development	Ongoing
3b	Ensure that health equity is a guiding principle in the way that we deliver screening through enhanced collaboration across the NSS and with our screening providers	Public Health	All NSS Staff	Ongoing

\* 'Programmes' refers to our four screening programmes; BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen.

## 4. Access and inclusivity

**Overview:** By understanding the screening pathway from a participant’s perspective, we can better understand service barriers and enablers and act to address them; for example, by providing reasonable accommodations. Applying technological innovations and creative solutions could improve accessibility and inclusivity.

### Our focus areas

- 4.1 Work to improve access to our services by, understanding and addressing barriers experienced by individuals and groups and by promoting awareness of existing supports.
- 4.2 Identify opportunities that enable or enhance access for never screened and under screened groups to participate in our screening services.
- 4.3 Consider the potential for implementing adaptations and flexibility to the screening pathway (including invitation and registration processes), where these are proven to be effective and feasible.
- 4.4 Evaluate the potential of innovative technologies and information systems in improving participation and experience for screening participants; for example, the Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) surveys which gather real-time feedback from participants at each stage of their screening journeys.
- 4.5 Develop frameworks and tools to support NSS programmes to identify the potential impacts of their decisions on those experiencing inequities; for example, an equity proofing decision-making type tool and or an equity impact assessment for new programmes and developments.

### Actions

No.	Action	NSS Lead	Key NSS Partners	Timeframe
4a	Implement the recommendations from the NSS disability needs assessment research report ( <i>Breaking down barriers, 2023</i> ), (aligned to action 2b)	Public Health	Programmes* and departments	2024-2025
4b	Develop equity-related decision-making aids to support NSS programmes in their equity work (e.g. frameworks, guides, tools and resources)	Public Health	Programmes and Communications Engagement and Information Development	2024-2025
4c	Ensure that all relevant projects, such as the decision-making tools, are informed by a behavioural science approach (tools, methods, theories)	Public Health	Programmes*, Communications Engagement and Information Development and Programme Evaluation Unit	2024-2025

\* ‘Programmes’ refers to our four screening programmes; BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen.



## 5. Communications

**Overview:** Communication can be a barrier to accessing screening for some people. By understanding and responding to the communication needs of audiences, we can address this barrier. Developing and testing content in partnership with our stakeholders is key to achieving this.

### Our focus areas

- 5.1 Assess communications needs and tailor messages, recognising both the digital health literacy divide and the role that technology can play.
- 5.2 Use appropriate, visual imagery which is representative of the diversity of screening participants.
- 5.3 Use engaging methods and channels of communication, including social media, to reflect and meet stakeholders' needs.
- 5.4 Use clear, concise, standardised, and evidence-based language, communications processes and approaches.
- 5.5 Proactively engage relevant stakeholders, including screening participants, in the development and review of resources.
- 5.6 Scope opportunities for successfully engaging with people who may be isolated and or not engaged with any community groups, advocacy groups or services.

### Actions

No.	Action	NSS Lead	Key NSS Partners	Timeframe
5a	Continue working to ensure our communications enable informed choice for all people who are eligible for screening	Communications Engagement and Information Development	Public Health, programmes* and departments	Ongoing
5b	Develop a <a href="#">NSS digital platform</a> on the NSS website to enable communication and resource-sharing on projects to improve equity in screening with our stakeholders	Communications, Engagement and Information Development	Public Health and programmes*	2024

\* 'Programmes' refers to our four screening programmes; BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen.



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