



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

# Choose Screening

Together we can make a difference

National Screening Service Strategic Plan 2023-2027  
**End of Year Report 2023**





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# Foreword from the Chief Executive

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Our core purpose is to provide health and care services that people can trust and have confidence in. In 2023, we began a strategic approach to achieving that purpose, with the launch of our first corporate strategy, [\*Choose Screening: Together we can make a difference\*](#).

Our strategy is ambitious and far-reaching. Our staff are working on 150 actions under the strategy pillars of Engagement and participation; Operational excellence; Service development; People and culture; Governance and quality assurance; and Data and information.

This year's annual report shows our progress in our first year of strategy implementation. We describe some of our many successes - and a few of the challenges we met along the way. In the following pages you will see described all the ways in which we are placing people at the heart of our processes; improving the visibility of our work; inviting and responding to feedback; and continuing to build staff and public trust. The report contains strong evidence of how our actions are underpinned by stakeholder insights and transparent decision-making.

Our corporate strategy is action-focused and purposeful, and the high completion rate of our actions in Year 1 is testament to this. Our teams are working well towards joint goals.

In addition to providing a flavour of the breadth and depth of the work under way, this Year 1 report shows how we are measuring the success of our actions.

I believe the actions described in these pages demonstrate our commitment to improving population health. They show how we are working to put people first, treat people equitably and provide value for money. They demonstrate our competence in delivering high quality and safe patient care which is reliable and consistent – and how we support and empower staff to fulfil that aim. Integral to all of this work is our drive to engage with people, to communicate well, to listen, and be inclusive and responsive in our relationships.

The work of our staff in 2023 clearly demonstrates our belief that excellence in service delivery is achieved by partnership working and a focus on engagement. This report shows that through working together, we are creating better outcomes for the people we care for in screening.

This work will continue as we head into Year 2 of our strategy implementation, and as we seek to enable everyone to be able to choose screening. I hope you will continue with us on this important journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Murphy'.

**Fiona Murphy**  
Chief Executive,  
National Screening Service

# Introduction

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Our Strategic Plan, [Choose Screening: Together we can make a difference](#) was launched by Minister for State Hildegard Naughton on 26 April 2023. The strategy is the result of extensive collaboration with stakeholders and is an important milestone for the National Screening Service (NSS). This report outlines progress made, challenges addressed, and work completed in Year 1 of the Strategic Plan.

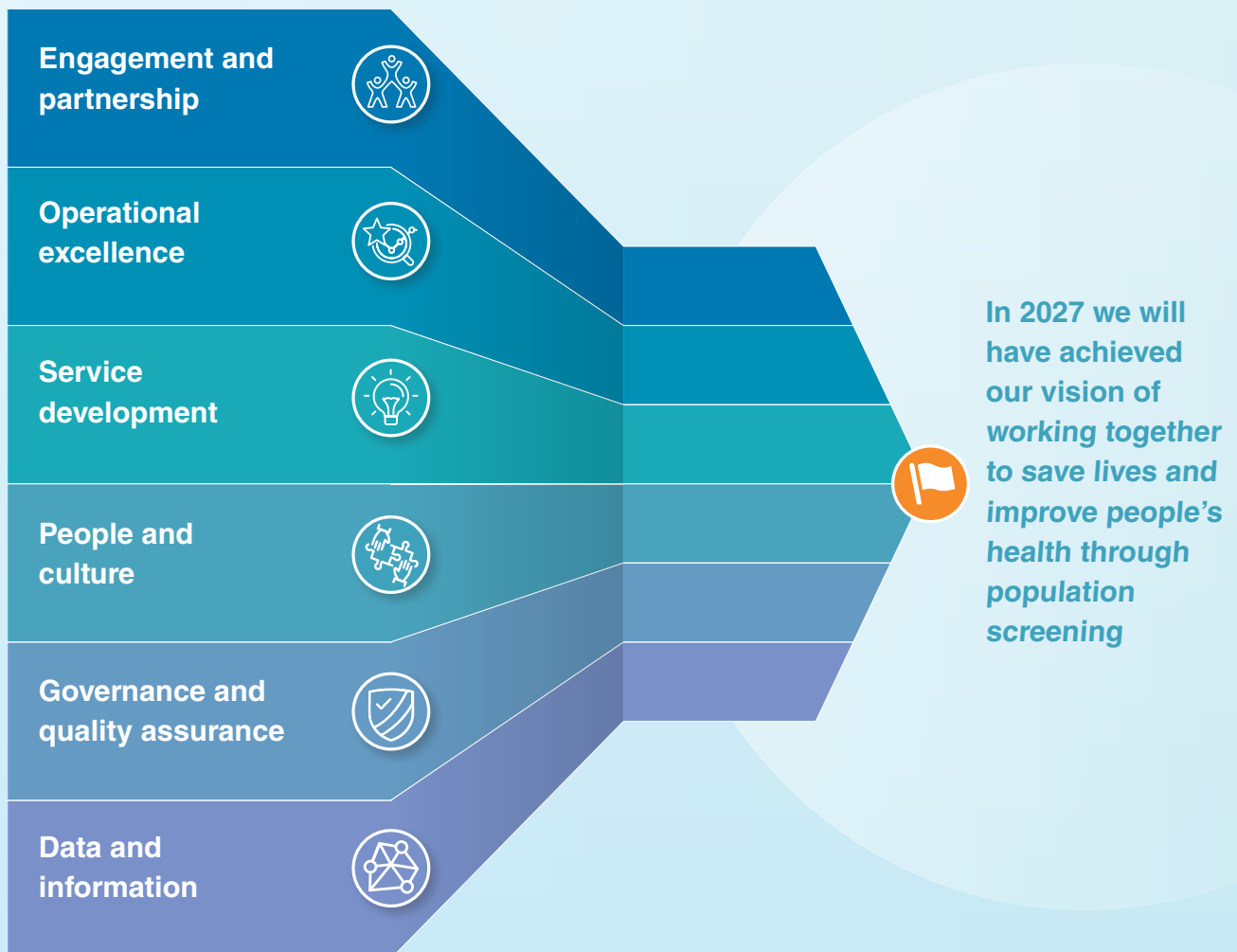
The strategy supports the breadth of service we are delivering within Ireland's national healthcare system. Putting people at the centre of what we do and working in partnership with our stakeholders are its central themes. The actions in our strategic implementation plan are connected strongly to our stated mission and vision. These actions are spread across three strategic priority and three enabling areas.

This report includes a section on each of our strategic and enabling goals, capturing some of the many highlights of 2023, as well as identifying commitments made in the National Service Plan 2023 (denoted by \* throughout). The report also includes a snapshot of how we measure the impact of our strategy as we progress through implementation.

The report is set against the backdrop of the National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) report, [Breast, cervical and colorectal cancer 1994-2019: National trends for cancers with population-based screening programmes in Ireland](#). Published in September 2022, the report detailed for the first time the positive impact of BowelScreen, BreastCheck and CervicalCheck on cancer detection in Ireland. There has been a noticeable increase in earlier diagnosis and a demonstrable reduction in mortality. Through the findings of the NCRI report, we can confidently say that a portion of the improvements in cancer detection is directly attributable to our population screening programmes. Our Year 1 strategy report shows how we are ensuring our programmes continue to make this valuable, trusted contribution to population health.



Figure 1: National Screening Service mission and vision



## Strategic Priority 1

# Engagement and partnership



**We will be an open, trusted, listening organisation that works with national and international partners to support equity, engagement, promote operational excellence and foster proactive service development, to improve the experience of our screening participants.**

Under our first strategic priority, Engagement and partnership, we set out to develop new partnerships and establish strategic collaborations. Some noteworthy achievements are outlined here.

### SPOTLIGHT ON

**Interval cancer project**

**Personal cervical screening reviews**

**Stakeholder engagement and research**

**Communications campaigns**

**Communications and information development**

**Elimination of cervical cancer**

**Improving equity in screening**

**Patient and public partnership**

**Managing feedback**

**Measuring engagement**

**Corporate website development**

## Interval Cancer project\* closes

We met with members of the Interval Cancer Steering Group, and implementation groups and our stakeholders on 27 October 2023 to mark the completion of the Interval Cancer project.

We outlined the substantive progress made during the implementation of the recommendations arising from the Expert Reference Groups (ERGs) and reflected on the conclusion of the project. Implementation group chairs delivered presentations on their work that has been completed and incorporated into ongoing work.

Two of our Patient and Public Partnership representatives, Brigid Doherty and Clara Clark, reflected on the role of the patient and public representative in healthcare, and their input to the reports.

The Interval Cancer project was initiated to implement the recommendations arising from the [Expert Reference Groups' reports](#) on interval cancer, published in 2020. Patient and public involvement was central to the project, ensuring the needs of screening programme participants were considered during the design and implementation of recommendations. We also engaged extensively with many other stakeholders. Implementation group membership included representation from advocacy groups, primary care, cancer screening experts, public health, legal experts, communication specialists, medical ethics, and health economics.



*Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide, National Cancer Control Programme National Director speaking with public and patient representatives Clara Clark and Brigid Doherty*

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



This significant collaboration, expertise and cooperation has resulted in the successful completion of the project.

Notable achievements include:

- design and implementation of [personal cervical screening reviews](#)
- standardisation of patient-requested review processes for BreastCheck and BowelScreen
- strengthened link with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland to enable data sharing and calculation of interval cancer rates
- research, debate and analysis relating to the legal structures within which screening operates
- informed contribution to the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) report on [best practices in cervical screening programmes](#)
- enhanced communications to inform choice and build trust and confidence in our screening programmes.

## Personal cervical screening reviews

Our journey to [personal cervical screening reviews](#) arose from the [Interval Cancer project](#) and a recommendation in the Expert Reference Group reports to “establish patient-requested review and disclosure processes”.

Reviews offer women who develop cervical cancer after screening an opportunity to look back over their screening care. They provide women with the support, information and reassurance they need to make informed decisions about what they want to know about their screening care.

The process design was overseen by a multidisciplinary implementation committee with representatives from our NSS Patient and Public Partnership panel, the Irish Cancer Society, clinical experts, communications and programme staff.

Patient and public input was key. We engaged directly with those who have been impacted by an interval cancer to incorporate their insights and experience. Putting women and their [experiences](#) at the centre of our process design was an important part of our learning as an organisation.

Reviews became available in early 2023 and are under way. We continue to listen and learn from the experiences of women who are going through their review processes. We will evaluate and adapt our work based on their feedback.

## Stakeholder engagement and research\*

We aim to increase public knowledge and understanding of screening and ensure the HSE remains the trusted source of critical health information in Ireland. One of the ways we do this is through providing evidence-based health information campaigns which run across print, social, digital, out-of-home and broadcast media. We measure public knowledge and understanding at intervals, and use this information to adapt how and what we communicate, and to whom.

At the beginning of 2023 we carried out a large-scale public attitudes survey to gauge knowledge and understanding of our four screening programmes. We used the survey results to develop our campaign messages for our programmes in 2023 and will continue this development in 2024. We publish the results of our surveys on our website, [www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie).

Our research data has been presented at international conferences by our Programme Evaluation Unit and programme clinical directors. During 2023 there were eight peer-reviewed publications involving our Programme Evaluation Unit.

We compared the results of our 2023 survey against our 2021 survey, measured improvements, and identified remaining gaps in public knowledge and understanding of screening. We continue to use this information to inform our communications campaign planning.

We know that by listening to and involving our stakeholders, we can improve how we work and ensure we are communicating effectively. We co-developed and published our [Stakeholder Engagement Framework](#) this year to empower partnership working throughout the life of our strategy. In it we set out our clear purpose and process for consistent stakeholder engagement to improve the quality and effectiveness of the services we provide.

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment





## Communications campaigns

We researched, designed and implemented large-scale evidence-based awareness campaigns for each of our four programmes in 2023 to help ensure people can make informed choices about screening.

Our campaigns are aimed at enabling more people to choose screening by providing key messages on what screening is, how to access it, and what screening can and can't do. They run across a mix of digital and social media, print, radio, video on demand and outside advertising.

We began the year with a BowelScreen campaign, before a CervicalCheck campaign during Cervical Cancer Prevention week in January. Our campaign also announced Ireland's action plan to eliminate cervical cancer in our lifetimes.

We entered Bowel Cancer Awareness Month in April with a campaign that focused on increasing uptake in bowel screening in both men and women.

In August and September, we were back promoting HPV cervical screening with a request for all women to check and update their contact details on the screening register.

Separately, we supported [a special initiative offering cervical screening to women in their 60s](#) who had not previously had a HPV test.

In October, we marked Breast Cancer Awareness Month with a campaign to encourage women to take up their first offer of breast screening.

We ran a Diabetic RetinaScreen campaign early in the year, before coming back to mark World Sight Day and World Diabetes Day with a further campaign that straddled the months of October and November.

We ran another BowelScreen campaign in November too, to promote the fact that bowel screening is now being offered to people aged 59-69.

We also marked Cervical Cancer Elimination Day of Action on 17 November with a stakeholder-focused campaign to highlight Ireland's action plan to eliminate cervical cancer. During the campaign, we announced the date at which Ireland expects to eliminate cervical cancer: 2040.

We will evaluate the impact of our 2023 campaigns and use the findings to inform future campaigns.

Our BowelScreen age extension social media campaign in November led to a 279% increase in registrations when compared to non-campaign period

HE | BreastCheck

**BreastCheck screening is available to women aged 50 to 69.**

Contact your GP if you notice any symptoms, no matter your age.



**A change in your bowel habits**

For example going to the toilet more often or diarrhoea that lasts for some weeks.

HE | BowelScreen



## Communications and information development\*

The 'Information Hub' is a collaboration between our Communications, Public Health, behavioural science and programme teams, and our Public and Patient Partnership. It is a process that enables people to share their expertise to develop information on screening for our stakeholders.

The Hub's aim is to co-produce communications content that builds awareness and understanding of screening in an open, accessible and equitable way, so people can make informed health choices. It is grounded in the principle of health literacy providing information that people can access, understand, appraise, and act on to manage their health. The Hub exited its pilot phase in 2023 with the appointment of a communications manager for information development.

The team's projects included information development for CervicalCheck's personal cervical screening reviews; Diabetic RetinaScreen's new eye screening in pregnancy pathway, and BreastCheck's consent form. It has also completed communications campaigns for the four programmes, and stakeholder information for the HSE's Cervical Cancer Elimination project. A programme of work has been developed for 2024.

Our Information Hub work is informed by our communications principles and values and guided by the objectives and actions of the [HSE's Communications Strategy 2023-25](#). It is evidence of the NSS's commitment to be an open, trusted, listening and responsive organisation.

## Elimination of cervical cancer\*

The focus of our screening programmes in 2023 was on developing new partnerships and strengthening existing alliances. This was in evidence as the NSS partnered with the National Cancer Control Programme, the National Immunisation Office, the National Women and Infants Programme, and the National Cancer Registry Ireland to launch Ireland's roadmap to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem.

On 17 November, the Minister of Health announced Ireland's 2040 target date for the elimination of cervical cancer at our event to mark Cervical Cancer Elimination Global Day of Action. The date was

modelled in partnership with experts in Australia led by Prof Karen Canfell. Her team has also led this type of work for the World Health Organization to establish their cervical cancer elimination strategy dates.

Over 80 guests from healthcare, education and advocacy groups attended the event, which received positive media engagement.

The Elimination roadmap was updated and Ireland's baseline position (as of December 2021) against the 90-70-90 Elimination targets was announced. We showed good progress in HPV vaccination (80%), HPV screening (73% coverage) and treatment (97% initiated in the first year). A national public consultation to develop a HSE-level action plan launched in March 2024, with plans to publish the action plan in November 2024.

## Improving equity in screening\*

The NSS has published a new strategic framework to address equity in screening. Accessible versions of the framework are available on our website, including easy-read, plain English, Irish sign language and screen-reader friendly versions.

The framework, [Improving Equity in Screening, a strategic framework 2023-2027](#), was co-produced in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including members of the public, representatives from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors, an advisory group and our staff.

The framework provides an overview of academic literature on equity in screening. This includes information on factors associated with increased incidence and prevalence of the four conditions we screen for; factors associated with reduced participation in screening; challenges with the measurement of equity in screening; barriers to participation in screening; and interventions to improve participation in screening.

It also sets out how we can better understand and improve equity across our four screening programmes by addressing five priority areas: research and data, education learning and development, partnership, access and inclusivity, and communications.

An equity oversight committee is supporting the development of action plans that will deliver on the areas outlined in the Framework.

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



**STRATEGY SNAPSHOT**

**Targeted Screening Initiatives with Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre Primary Health Care for Travellers Project**

A National Screening Service (NSS), National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre partnership

The aim of this partnership, which started in 2022, is to:

- address cancer prevention and early detection, and provide information on the four screening programmes for the Traveller population in Finglas and Blanchardstown
- assess barriers to the uptake of our services by working with Traveller primary healthcare workers and provide access to services for those who wanted to participate.

The BowelScreen project was completed in 2022. The BreastCheck and CervicalCheck projects were completed in 2023. The partnership approach included delivering co-designed education sessions to healthcare workers on fieldwork, evaluation and registration. The screening programmes organised screening for any Travellers eligible and wanting to participate in the programmes.

**We found that:**

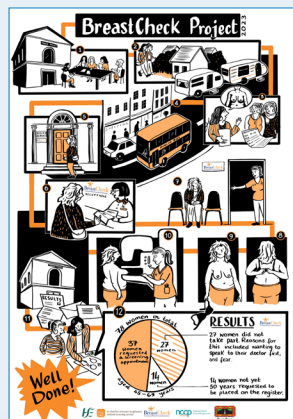
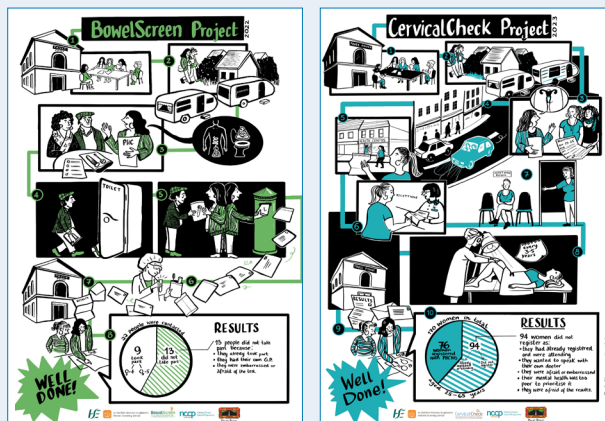
- Primary healthcare workers reported good outreach into communities and use of the information.
- The projects increased participation in bowel, breast and cervical screening among the people in the communities being targeted.
- Barriers that were addressed included literacy issues, postal difficulties and fear of the screening process.

We co-created graphics for the BowelScreen, BreastCheck and CervicalCheck projects with an illustrator and the primary healthcare workers to give an [overview of the projects' processes and findings](#) for people in the communities.

We are planning to begin a targeted Diabetic RetinaScreen project during 2024.

“The infographics for the projects were important to show the hard work of the Traveller primary healthcare workers who worked on this project. We made sure it was culturally appropriate and showed the work involved in the project, such as showing the different types of Traveller accommodation, and the challenges for Travellers in accessing their post. The visuals are eye-catching, and will give great recognition to the Traveller women involved.”

*Mary Brigid Collins, co-ordinator of the Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre Primary Health Care Project*



“It’s about saving lives. It’s not just about giving people information now for this project, but they’ll always have the information”

*Primary healthcare worker, BreastCheck focus group*



## Patient and Public Partnership Strategy 2019-2023

The NSS Patient and Public Partnership (PPP) network, which was established in 2019, comprises 28 representatives from across Ireland. We work in partnership with the PPP to design our information materials and inform our objectives and actions from their input on our project working groups and various committees. These include the BreastCheck Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) project, the CervicalCheck self-sampling project, our quality assurance committees, Quality Safety and Risk Committee and NSS Equity Oversight Committee.

Our [Patient and Public Partnership Strategy 2019-2023](#) was fully implemented in 2023. PPP representatives and the PPP project team worked collaboratively to support the integration of our PPP into our business and operations. During the year, the group launched a co-designed national recruitment campaign, focused on increasing the diversity of the PPP Network, and created an e-learning module, which was launched to support staff and patients working on our PPP.

In-person events were hosted in January and October with staff and patients, capturing and learning from patient experiences to improve our screening services.

The PPP Implementation Group's structures are co-designed, and the group has been preparing to move to its permanent position within the

Communications, Engagement and Information Development function in 2024. The group became a permanent PPP committee in early 2024 and a new chair has been appointed. The committee reports directly into the Chief Executive's office and provides oversight and governance for all PPP activities across the NSS.

The PPP project team is overseeing an evaluation of our PPP strategy implementation and readiness for change. This evaluation will provide recommendations for the next phase of PPP in the NSS.

### Some key findings from our evaluation:

- 65% of NSS staff think the PPP Strategy has been successfully implemented.
- 83% of NSS staff report that PPP values are demonstrated across NSS.
- 100% of PPP representatives think the PPP strategy is achieving its objectives.
- 91% of PPP representatives feel their contributions make a difference to the work of the NSS.
- 91% of PPP representatives are confident their information/feedback will be used by the NSS.

"I really enjoyed being able to meet NSS staff and fellow patient reps, face to face. I believe that the testimonials will help to broaden PPP involvement"  
*Grace Rattigan, PPP representative*

## STRATEGY SNAPSHOT

### Patient and Public Partnership video and podcast

In June, PPP representative Grace Rattigan joined NSS Chief Executive Fiona Murphy to create episode 16 of the HSE's Talking Health and Wellbeing podcast.

In the podcast episode, [#choosescreening](#), they talked about the NSS's Strategy, and the role of information and communication in helping people to make informed choices about screening.

Grace shared her experience of being involved with the PPP; how she is part of the Quality Assurance Committee for CervicalCheck; and how she has seen her advice being implemented.

The podcast is available on all the main podcast platforms, as well as YouTube.



NSS Chief Executive Fiona Murphy (left) and PPP representative Grace Rattigan while recording their podcast

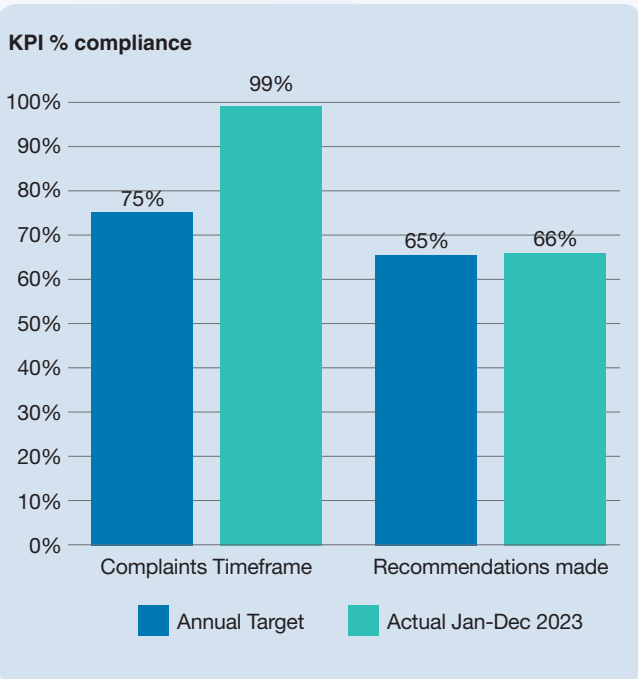


## Managing feedback

We are implementing formal pathways for managing feedback under [Your Service Your Say](#) (YSYS) and the mandatory National Complaints Management System.

This means we can identify themes and trends relating to public engagement, monitor compliance and provide evidence of our work to maintain and increase public trust and confidence.

In 2023, we made progress on implementing formal pathways for receiving feedback via our call centre and info@mailboxes. We are redeveloping our internal system to capture feedback that falls both within and outside YSYS. We introduced the national complaints management system this year.

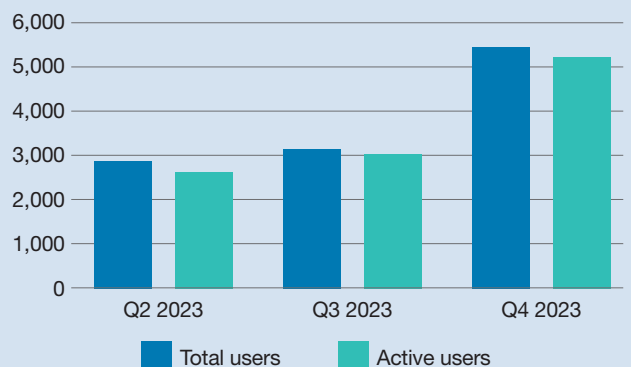


## Measuring engagement and impressions on digital platforms

Data from our digital and social media platforms demonstrates that we have engaged stakeholders with our communications and content, and consistently increased engagement and grown our audience throughout 2023.

- 12,285 users connected with our corporate website (April to December 2023). The number of website users consistently increased throughout the year from 3,741 in Q2 to 5,527 in Q4.
- Almost half (43%) of users were new visitors to the website demonstrating that we are consistently reaching and engaging a new audience.
- We published 75 blogs in 2023. Our blogs were viewed over 16,000 times.
- Our reports and publications were downloaded over 2,500 times.
- The average user engagement rate on our website was 62%. The engagement rate increased consistently throughout the year, from 50% in Q2 to 71% in Q4.
- Our posts on X (formerly called Twitter) were viewed almost 1 million times (960k impressions).
- The average monthly engagement rate on X was consistently above the industry average at 2.45%.
- Active stakeholder engagement was demonstrated at our annual CervicalCheck colposcopy conference when it trended on X in April (#ColpConference23) and similarly our hashtag for Cervical Cancer Elimination Day of Action trended in November (#TogetherTowardsElimination).

**No. of users on screeningservice.ie  
1 April to 31 December 2023**



*Website data only represents users who have accepted analytics cookies. For reference, in Q1 2023, 55% of users to the HSE website accepted analytics cookies.*



## Corporate website development: building trust and confidence through responsive and proactive communications

With the launch of our new corporate website in 2023 ([www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie)), we are transforming how we engage and communicate with the public and our stakeholders. We have leveraged our new website to report consistently on our activity, progress and performance. Through both our responsive and proactive communications, we are building trust and confidence in our health service by providing an experienced and expert voice in population screening.


By reporting regularly on our service developments, new initiatives, projects, and new publications and research, we have:

- improved our communications with our screening participants
- improved access to information about our screening programmes, including the benefits, harms and limitations of screening, to support people to make informed choices
- supported our stakeholders to ensure continued accurate, evidence-based and up-to-date information for the public on screening programmes
- demonstrated our accountability to our screening participants and wider stakeholders
- strengthened our engagement with national and international networks, partners and communities
- reinforced our openness and transparency
- demonstrated that we are a leading and expert voice in population screening.

We have developed a vibrant healthcare news website that serves as a key engagement tool for our diverse stakeholder needs. We have enhanced our proactive communications by sharing all our latest news on our social media platforms. In 2023 our news coverage:


- provided open and accessible information about screening to increase health literacy
- amplified the patient voice by sharing personal experiences and stories
- highlighted the work of our Patient and Public Partnership
- provided updates on our work to improve equity in screening
- kept our stakeholders updated on new research findings and developments
- informed about the publication of new programme reports and strategies
- reported on our collaborations with international partners
- demonstrated our commitment to good governance, quality assurance and continuous improvement
- reported on our conferences and events.

### Featured news




[National Screening Service joins forces with international partners on groundbreaking research using AI to improve bowel cancer screening](#)

Our BowelScreen programme is taking part in a five-year research project exploring the use of artif...



[Latest news update from the National Screening Service – 19 December 2023](#)

The latest news summary featuring updates from across the National Screening Service - December 2023



[Introduction of HPV self-sampling could increase numbers of women participating in cervical screening, new research shows](#)

We've recently completed research to better understand the potential role of HPV self-sampling for ...

[View all](#)

## Strategic Priority 2

# Operational excellence



*We will deliver internationally leading, evidence-based, quality assured population screening programmes and demonstrate their impact.*

### SPOTLIGHT ON

**Patient reported experience surveys**

**National Cervical Screening Laboratory**

**Management of opportunities to improve performance**

**Programme standards and measures**

**10 years of Diabetic RetinaScreen**

**IARC report on cervical screening**

## Capturing patient experience of screening (patient reported experience measures)\*

For health screening to benefit the population, all screening programmes must reach an optimum screening uptake within the target population.

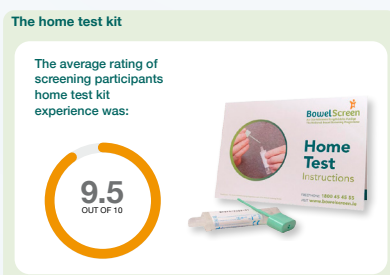
To explore and understand more about why people do / do not attend screening, and how we can ensure that they have the best possible experience when they do attend, we capture real-time feedback from people through what is called a Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) programme. In 2022, this digital approach was first used to gather responses from people attending [BowelScreen](#). The response rate in 2023 was 47%.

In August 2023, we extended the programme and began inviting women attending [BreastCheck](#) to give us their feedback following their appointments. In the first phase of this PREMs project, women who have a BreastCheck mammogram and receive a normal result are being sent an SMS (text) message inviting them to provide a measure of

their experience. This helps us understand what is working well, and identify potential areas where we can improve our service.

Information on PREMs is available at BreastCheck clinics, and through our social media channels. The quantitative and qualitative responses from the PREMs survey are providing detailed information on a range of areas, including the accessibility of the service, our communications, and general satisfaction. Our PREMs programme will be the largest patient experience survey ever conducted in a breast cancer screening programme worldwide.

We plan to implement PREMs across the Diabetic RetinaScreen programme in 2024 followed by CervicalCheck in 2025. PREMs is helping to identify areas of success in screening pathway processes, as well as areas for improvement. The rich information captured helps us strengthen our connection with our programme participants, demonstrate our desire to listen to what they have to say, and in parallel develop a quality improvement portfolio for each programme to drive change and measure the impact and success of that change.



\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



## National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL)\*

In January 2023, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly visited the new National Cervical Screening Laboratory during Cervical Cancer Prevention Week.

The laboratory at The Coombe Hospital processed its first samples for our CervicalCheck programme in December 2022, after a significant collaborative effort involving the NSS, The Coombe Hospital management, and the Department of Health.

Over the coming years, it is our aim that the NCSL will become the main provider of laboratory services for CervicalCheck, and will provide opportunities to expand the training and development of staff related to cervical screening in Ireland.



*Minister Donnelly inspecting HPV testing machines, left and below, with, from left, Lead Pathologist Dr Aoife Doyle; the laboratory's Interim Director Dr Cillian De Gascun; and CervicalCheck Clinical Director Prof Nóirín Russell*

## Identification and management of opportunities to improve performance

Our programmes continually work to identify opportunities to improve performance and implement corrective actions, as required. The following showcase some of these initiatives.

Our BreastCheck programme monitors geographical areas to improve uptake in areas where women face more barriers in accessing screening. In 2023 and early 2024, we made detailed plans for two new satellite screening units to increase breast screening in the Dublin and Limerick areas.

Throughout 2023, the women recalled for further assessment in the BreastCheck programme is higher than in previous years. To support this, we have provided additional assessment clinics to increase capacity.

When HPV testing was introduced in March 2020, the upper age eligibility for CervicalCheck was extended from 60 to 65 years. Therefore, some women who had their last cervical screening by 2020 under the previous age range (up to 60) did not have the opportunity of a CervicalCheck HPV screening under the new age range (up to 65).

To manage this, the CervicalCheck programme supported an age extension project in September. This comprised bespoke invitations being issued to approximately 107,000 women, who were 60–65 years of age in 2020, to attend for one HPV cervical screening test. This was supported through a proactive communications plan. To date, over 18,000 women have responded.

The DRS programme engaged in various initiatives to support additional demand for screening such as Saturday clinics, and close collaboration with treatment clinics. In 2023, the DRS register grew by approximately 21,000 new registrations, this was an increase of approximately 5,000 on previous years.

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment





## Programme standards and measures\*

Each of our four screening programmes operates in line with national and international best practice standards, which ensures our programmes achieve their aims to improve population health.

Each programme continuously monitors its standards and measures, and reports on their progress via their programme reports.

We monitor key performance indicators at defined intervals and aggregate the metrics annually. The most recent full year data available for reporting purposes is 2022, and we will report on 2023 full year data when available at the end of 2024.

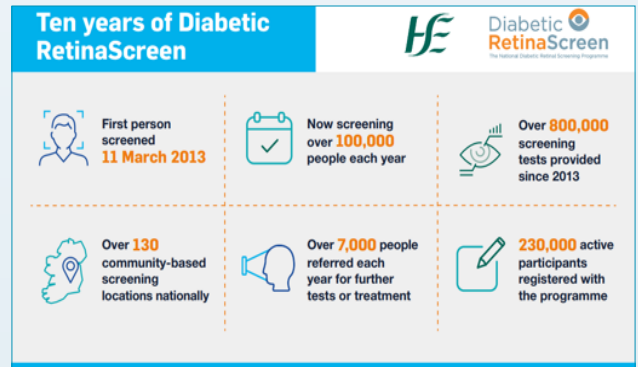
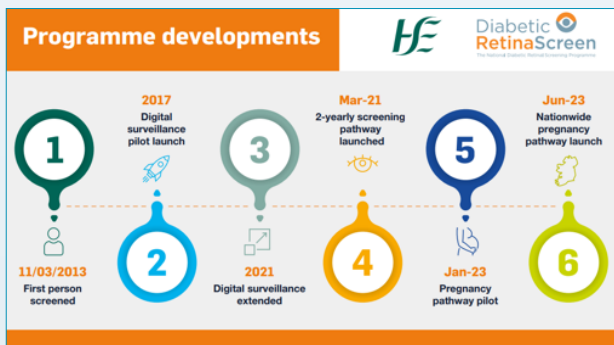
Our Programmes Evaluation Unit completed a review and produced a report for each of our cancer screening programmes comparing our databases against the census data. This is essential to ensure completeness of our population database numbers as inaccuracies impact participation/coverage rates.

## Ten years of Diabetic RetinaScreen

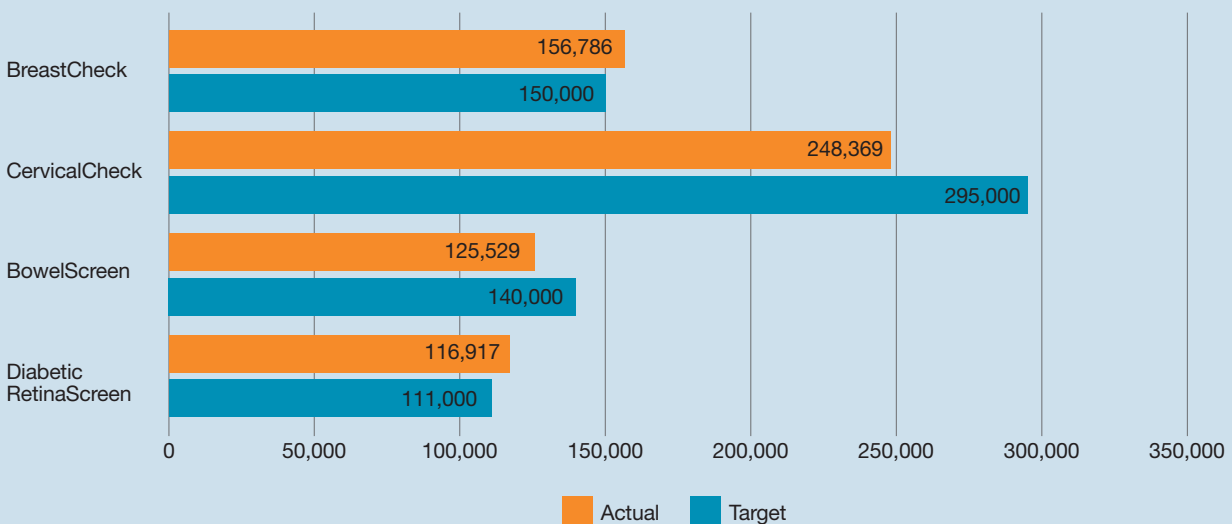
Our newest screening programme, Diabetic RetinaScreen (DRS), marked 10 years of offering screening to people with diabetes, on World Sight Day on 12 October.

The establishment of DRS has been a significant milestone in the improvement of retinopathy detection and early treatment for people with diabetes.

Over the past decade we have delivered over 800,000 screens to people who have diabetes and have referred over 70,000 people for further tests or treatment to prevent or reduce sight loss. We now provide screening through a [network of over 130 community-based locations](#) across the country, with eight treatment clinics across the four provinces.



Numbers screened per programme 2022



\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



## IARC recommendations on best practices in cervical screening reviews

On 5 July 2023, the NSS joined the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and colleagues from the Department of Health and the HSE for the launch of the [IARC Report: Recommendations on Best Practices in Cervical Screening Programmes](#).

The report is the result of the CervScreen Project, a collaboration between IARC, the Department of Health and the HSE. A key part of the report's evolution was the involvement of a stakeholder advisory group from Ireland, which included patients and public representatives. The report endorsed Ireland's approach to offering personal cervical screening reviews and included recommendations on the audit of cervical cancers, the legal and ethical framework of cervical screening, communications, and workforce competencies.

*At the IARC launch, NSS staff from left: CervicalCheck Programme Manager Gráinne Gleeson; General Manager of Communications, Engagement and Information Development Fiona Ness; CervicalCheck Clinical Director Prof Nóirín Russell; Specialist in Public Health Medicine Dr Alan Smith; Chief Executive Fiona Murphy; Director of Public Health Dr Caroline Mason Mohan; and Head of Strategy, Business and Projects Grace Turner*



## Strategic Priority 3

# Service development



***We will be at the forefront of developments in population screening programmes that support the prevention and early recognition of disease. We will conduct and commission research, review evidence, and work with policy makers to provide an experience and expert voice in population screening.***

### SPOTLIGHT ON

[Pregnancy pathway in Diabetic RetinaScreen](#)

[Cervical screening self-sampling](#)

[BowelScreen age expansion](#)

[Research, publications and shared learning](#)

## Retina screening for women with diabetes who are pregnant\*

We know that the risk of diabetic retinopathy can increase during pregnancy. This means women with type 1 or type 2 diabetes who become pregnant need eye screening more often.

A goal of our strategy was to complete a pilot scheme to offer eye screening to women who had diabetes at the time they became pregnant.

We completed the pilot in early 2023 and rolled out the initiative nationwide a few months later. This screening option is now available nationally to all women who are pregnant and have diabetes nationally.

Women who have diabetes at the time they become pregnant are now being referred to the DRS programme by their maternity service as part of their initial assessment, or by their diabetes nurse or hospital doctor.

A clinical advisory group has been established to review and enhance the pregnancy screening offering. We are updating our screening database software to efficiently manage women through the process.

So far, approximately 400 women have attended screening through the pregnancy pathway, which has exceeded our expectations.

At the launch at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, from left: DRS Programme Manager Helen Kavanagh; Karen O'Connor of the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital; NSS Chief Executive Fiona Murphy; Consultant Endocrinologist Assoc Prof Mensud Hatunic; Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly; patient advocate Vicky Doyle; and DRS Clinical Director Prof David Keegan.



\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



## STRATEGY SNAPSHOT

### Launch of new DRS screening initiative for women who are pregnant

We were delighted to see the full return of in-person events in 2023, enabling us to host and engage with stakeholders, and gain their insights and feedback in person. On back of the successful launch of our NSS corporate strategy by Minister Hildegard Naughton in April, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly joined us in June to launch our new Diabetic RetinaScreen [screening initiative](#) for women who have diabetes and become pregnant.

The launch at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital in Dublin was attended by patient advocate Vicky Doyle, who had more frequent diabetic retinopathy screening through the initiative. She said the new system gave her “a sense of being minded. The efficiency and regularity is good, you get the appointment, test and your results arrive very soon after your test. You can’t ask for any better. It’s a joined-up service and there’s a continuum of care.”

Diabetic RetinaScreen Clinical Director Professor David Keegan said that while we know that not everyone can or does take up their offer of screening, “by joining with our maternity hospitals to offer this service, we want to better inform women, to help them choose screening.”

“This pathway is another important development in how we support women’s health. I am delighted to see how funding for such projects from the Women’s Health Fund are now being realised, improving equality and quality of access to care for women.”

*Minister for Health,  
Stephen Donnelly*

### Cervical screening self-sampling project\*

Under the strategic objective of pioneering new screening methodologies, our Public Health team has completed a piece of research to explore the potential role of self-sampling in CervicalCheck.

HPV self-sampling has been introduced in nine countries with varying success but has shown to improve uptake in under- and never-screened populations. Research has demonstrated that self-collected samples can have similar accuracy to clinician-collected samples, but further work is needed to confirm this.

International experts have advised caution on implementing a self-sampling option too quickly, especially in programmes with high-population coverage (Ireland’s current coverage is 73%). The validation of a self-sampling kit for use, as well as developing guidance on optimal laboratory processes, remains an international research priority. In the meantime, we will continue to explore how a self-sampling option might be implemented in the CervicalCheck programme, and learn from the results of our recent survey.

### Our research has shown that women in Ireland are accepting of self-sampling:

- 42% of total respondents said they would continue to choose screening done by a GP or a sample taker.
- Half of all respondents (51%) said they would choose some form of self-sampling.
- 65% of those who were never screened, and 62% of those who were under-screened, would choose self-sampling, compared with 41% of regular screening attenders.

The results indicate that a self-sampling option could improve uptake of screening in under- and never-screened populations, while regular attenders would continue to choose screening with a GP or practise nurse.

The opinions and attitudes of the GPs and sampletakers providing this service in Ireland must also be considered. A recent survey of 200 sampletakers found that the majority are in favour of self-sampling as a potential addition to the CervicalCheck service because of the benefit of increasing screening uptake.

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



## BowelScreen age expansion

In October, our bowel screening programme began [lowering its age range](#) to invite men and women aged from 59 to take the free at-home test.

Bowel screening was previously available to those aged 60 to 69, now it is 59 to 69. When our expansion is complete, everyone aged 55 to 74 will be invited for screening. This makes the free home screening test available to more people.

Age expansion is outlined in the [National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026](#) and in the [Programme for Government](#). Research shows that the maximum benefit of bowel screening will be achieved when it is available to everyone aged 55 to 74. We are expanding the age range gradually, in carefully managed stages, to ensure everyone we offer screening to has access to onward testing and treatment, if needed.

## Research, publications and shared learning

Our Programme Evaluation Unit's core work is data provision, analysis and interpretation for the four screening programmes, and for key internal and external stakeholders. The unit this year finalised its research strategy for 2023-2027 and began its implementation. Our research committee reviews the strategy quarterly and provides an annual update to our Executive Management Team.

There are several research projects under way or completed to support service development. These include:

- a major study on self-sampling for cervical screening
- research exploring artificial intelligence in screening via pillcam for bowel screening
- two externally funded research projects to improve BowelScreen attendance
- commencement of an EU Horizon study examining the bowel microbiome
- research on the impact of the change to a two-year screening interval in Diabetic RetinaScreen
- prize winning research on non-attendance at Diabetic RetinaScreen.

*BowelScreen Clinical Director Prof Pádraic Mac Mathúna announced this year that the BowelScreen programme is a co-investigator in an EU Horizon-funded project. The [research](#) will look at the possibility of using AI microbiome data in screening for bowel cancer. It will involve 1,500 FIT-positive BowelScreen participants who are undergoing a colonoscopy at either the Mater or St Vincent's hospitals in Dublin, or the Mercy University Hospital in Cork. All patient data will be anonymised and their samples will be analysed at University College Cork's Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre.*



## Research collaborations, publications and shared learning

Our research strategy 2023-2027 contains five pillars as follows: research programmes; collaborations; staff development; wider HSE engagement; and dissemination. By sharing our research and learnings both nationally and internationally in 2023, we have enabled the work of screening programmes internationally, created opportunities for collaboration, and delivered staff development through three supporting research seminars.



*Dr Alan Smith addressing the World Endoscopy Organisation conference in May*



*Diabetic RetinaScreen (DRS) Clinical Director Prof David Keegan with the DRS team at the Diabetes Ireland Conference and Exhibition (DICE)*

*In 2023, we published research on the first evidence in Ireland of the impact HPV vaccination on high-grade CIN among 25-year-old women who were offered HPV vaccination.*

*Our co-authored paper won a RAMI (Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland Research Award 2023 – Section of Epidemiology) titled Screen-detected ductal carcinoma in-situ 2008-2020*

In May, Dr Alan Smith demonstrated Ireland's world-leading work capturing patient-reported experience measures (PREMs) in real-time in a national screening programme at the World Endoscopy Organisation conference.

In April, we attended and presented scientific posters at the British Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (BSCCP) annual scientific meeting where we met with international colleagues to share evidence of how HPV cervical screening is operating across health systems.

Our presentation topics included motivators and barriers to cervical screening in Ireland; the effect of HPV vaccination on the rate of high-grade cytology in 25-year-old women attending for cervical screening in Ireland; HPV awareness and understanding in Ireland - three years after the introduction of the primary HPV cervical screening programme; trends in the management of CIN2+

in Ireland; and the development of a LGBT+ quick reference guide for sample takers.

In June, CervicalCheck Clinical Director Prof Nóirín Russell and Programme Manager Gráinne Gleeson shared our best practice procedures for personal cervical screening reviews, and our insights on the effect of HPV vaccination with colleagues at the Norwegian cervical screening programme.

During this month also, we shared our research findings at the International Cancer Screening Network (ICSN) conference. This included the exhibition of seven posters and one oral presentation.

At the European Diabetic Eye Disease Conference in October we engaged the international community with the results of our new, two-yearly eye screening initiative for people with diabetes.

# Enabling Priority 1

## People and culture



*We will have an open, responsive and supportive environment where our people have what they need to develop, deliver and succeed. The NSS will be a workplace of choice, where our staff feel valued, supported and engaged.*

### SPOTLIGHT ON

Organisational development project

Workforce planning

Learning and development

Performance Achievement

Dignity at work

### Organisational Development project

*“Engage, develop and value staff to deliver the best possible care and services, fostering a culture in line with our values of care, compassion, trust and learning.”*

#### NSS strategic objective

We have worked to develop a culture that embodies care, compassion, trust and learning.

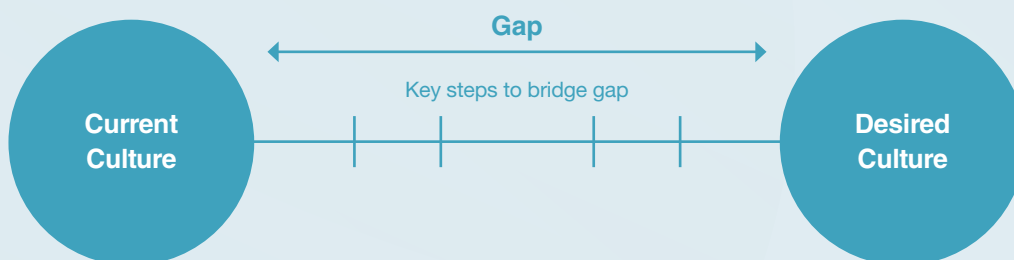
In 2023, we began a project on organisational development to guide how we embed and monitor our values, actions and behaviours. Core elements of this project include reviewing our current culture. In reviewing our current culture we developed an analysis tool to explore a range of data sources including organisational assets and staff feedback, which included the HSE Staff Survey.

As the NSS participation in the 2021 HSE Staff Survey was 14.5%, we committed to increase staff participation in the HSE 2023 Staff Survey to gather

staff engagement data to support our organisational development plans. We achieved a participation rate of 46% which is a significant increase on 2021. The survey results demonstrate a high score in engagement, role satisfaction and trust. It also highlights key areas for consideration. The data captured is supporting the development of an action plan on organisational development.

To further inform our organisational development plans, we completed an in-depth assessment of our culture and completed a gap analysis against our desired culture as set out in the strategy. This will enable us to identify key actions and direct future workings for 2024.

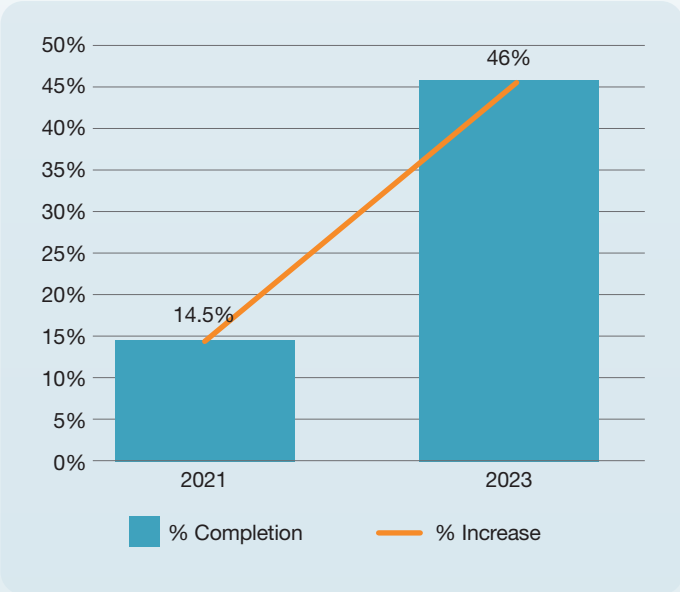
We have delivered briefing sessions across several NSS sites to inform staff on our organisational development project and provide opportunities to allow staff to be involved in this project in 2024. We are committed to ensuring our staff are engaged and see us as an employer of choice.





**Employee engagement score**  
2023 Staff Survey  
**74%**

**Staff survey completion**



**10-year strategic workforce plan**

Our project to develop a 10-year workforce plan got under way this year. The development of the workforce plan involved the generation of information, analysing the data, that will inform future demand for people and skills, and translate that analysis into a set of actions. This year, we identified a workforce methodology (in line with HSE and National Doctors Training & Planning quantitative models), generated and evaluated standardised workforce datasets, and mobilised programme working groups.

We developed a draft 10-year workforce plan which sets out modelling of NSS workforce demand and supply over a 10-year period and the resulting shortfall. We expect to publish this in 2024. This is the first step in a new approach to NSS workforce planning, which will inform future projects such as recruitment, retention, and succession planning. In addition, we developed and implemented an employee exit survey to gather data to inform future work on an NSS retention plan.

**Learning and development**

We are committed to supporting a culture for our staff that embodies our HSE values of care, compassion, trust and learning. One of the supports we offer is increased opportunities for staff training, learning and development. We are on track to deliver a targeted learning and development plan by the end of 2024, to ensure our staff have access to opportunities for training, learning and development. We continue to foster staff education, training and development through the promotion of our Academic Study Sponsorship Scheme, HSeLand courses and other training opportunities.

During this year, we conducted an exercise to review all available HSE online and in-person programmes, and in turn compiled a repository of programmes to support the development of the learning and development plan. We started to include course reviews in our monthly staff newsletter, in order to share insights and promote access to learning opportunities.

We also began a senior management development programme whereby senior staff are supported in their leadership role, strengthen collaborative working and promote shared decision-making throughout NSS.

**Training requests**  
2023  
**69**

“The process of applying for funding was straightforward and I would recommend anyone who is considering a course to meet with their manager to discuss it.”  
*Mary Sheedy, NSS*





### CASE STUDY

## Academic Study Sponsorship Scheme

In line with the our Strategy and our value for learning, the NSS Academic Study Sponsorship Scheme promotes continuous improvement and supports staff in reaching their full potential by providing access to opportunities for training, learning and development.

Applications are discussed and approved by a person’s line manager before submission. Courses selected for study must enhance a person’s skills and knowledge relevant to their role, support their career development, and be linked to their Performance Achievement goals or learning needs.

Successful applicants receive a minimum of 50% funding of course fees, up to a maximum of €10,000 for the entire duration of a course. One recipient of academic sponsorship was Mary Sheedy, Deputy Programme Manager of BowelScreen. She recently graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland with an MSc in Healthcare Management.

### Performance Achievement

2023

219 Complete

47%

\* HSE Target 70%

### Performance Achievement

We continue to promote and support the Performance Achievement process among our teams. We recorded an improvement in our performance achievement completion rates this year.

We have developed and conducted a short survey to help us work out the barriers staff face in completing their Performance Achievement process. The findings of these surveys are being analysed with the focus of creating more ways to enable staff complete the process and bring us towards the HSE goal of 70% of staff completing the yearly Performance Achievement process.

### Dignity at work

We want a positive culture where all our staff are encouraged, supported and treated with dignity and respect. Following our roll-out of the HSE Dignity at Work policy in 2022/2023 we have developed a dedicated workshop to support our staff in recognising, responding and preventing bullying and harassment in the workplace. A pilot workshop was delivered in 2023 and will be rolled out across all NSS sites in 2024.

Included below are a few other key metrics which align to the people and culture priority, such as internal promotions and turnover rates, which demonstrates our commitment to support and value staff development, and retain essential knowledge and skills within the organisation. Our aim is for staff to feel supported in maintaining their health and wellbeing, and absenteeism is an indicator we use to monitor this.

### Internal promotions

2023

20.75%

### Absenteeism

2023

4.42%

\* HSE Target 4%

### Turnover

2023

9.9%

## Enabling Priority 2

# Governance and quality assurance



*We will demonstrate good governance and leadership across the NSS to assure our staff, external partners, screening participants and the public that we are effectively discharging our roles and responsibilities, implementing and supporting a culture of quality assurance and improvement, and delivering value for money.*

### SPOTLIGHT ON

Training and education

Project Management Office

Quality assurance policy framework

Finance

BowelScreen quality assurance standards

## Training and education

To capture and support further training of NSS staff, our Quality, Safety and Risk Management (QSRM) team has put in place a quarterly review of mandatory training and delivered several training sessions throughout the year.

We have provided or organised sessions on risk management, internal quality auditing, open disclosure and the management of incidents which included System Analysis Review training delivered by HSE National Quality and Patient Safety Directorate.

The QSRM team also created a shared learning forum that meets regularly. All learnings that arise from the forum, including access to risk registers, are accessible to all staff. The team has provided and supports the development of our programmes' individual risk registers, management of incident and compliance with legislation, standards and national policies.

### STRATEGY SNAPSHOT

## CervicalCheck Education Strategy

In May 2023, CervicalCheck staff and Education Advisory Group representatives met to launch the [CervicalCheck Education Strategy 2022-2025](#).

The strategy supports the continued growth of high-quality, accessible education for healthcare professionals, including GPs, trainee GPs and practice nurses involved in delivering cervical screening in Ireland.

Our Chief Executive Fiona Murphy told attendees at the launch that the health professionals who carry out screening tests were pivotal to delivering a high-quality service. She said: "The vast majority of the cervical screening tests taken every year are carried out in GP surgeries and clinics. As well as answering any questions people may have prior to having the test, these highly skilled staff also ensure results are communicated to women and recommendations are followed up. They play a key role in supporting people to take part in cervical screening. Ensuring those who take CervicalCheck tests have access to excellent, ongoing training and development has been crucial to the provision of a quality-assured cervical screening programme and to the health of women in Ireland."



"Together we have created a woman-centred strategy that will guide all those involved in taking CervicalCheck screening tests in their professional practice for many years to come."

*Dr Rachael Comer,  
Education and Training  
Manager*

*At the launch of CervicalCheck Education Strategy 2022 – 2025, from left: Chief Executive Fiona Murphy, Primary Care Clinical Advisor with CervicalCheck Dr Sarah Fitzgibbon; Clinical Director of CervicalCheck Prof Nóirín Russell; CervicalCheck Programme Manager Gráinne Gleeson; and CervicalCheck Education and Training Manager Dr Rachael Comer*



## Project Management Office (PMO)

In 2023, our PMO expanded the roll-out of our Knowledge Sharing Forum. This forum provides support to staff managing team projects in their development of key project management skills.

The PMO aims to standardise our approach to project management across the organisation using project methodologies, tools and templates. This year, five learning events were delivered virtually using a mix of theory presentations and practical application sessions where staff had the opportunity to apply key project management skills.

The PMO team provided facilitated workshops to support teams to plan and initiate their projects as well as five individual supported sessions to staff with specific project management queries. This support has been received very well by staff and will continue to be made available throughout 2024.

## Quality assurance policy framework\*

Our Quality, Safety & Risk team and Public Health team, in collaboration with our four screening programmes, have put in place a quality assurance policy framework with the aim of creating a standardised, cross-programme approach to quality assurance.

The framework provides an objective, consistent and effective approach to quality assurance with the aim of improving outcomes for people who choose screening. This work is essential to maximise the intended benefits while minimising the unintended harms for those taking part. The framework supports our screening programmes to make use of structures, policies and procedures in a standardised and consistent manner, enabling them to identify and implement quality improvements.

This year, we completed a gap analysis of quality assurance standards across our four population screening programmes. From this work, we developed [NSS/S&F-6 QA Policy Framework: Standard Setting & Revision Procedure](#) which provides a standardised and consistent approach to setting quality standards for our population screening programmes.

Quality assurance is the process of checking that standards are met and encouraging continuous improvement. Assuring and influencing the quality of services is essential if population screening is to achieve the intended benefits to population health, while minimising unintended harms to those taking part. Quality assurance covers the entire screening pathway from identification of the eligible population to be invited for screening through to referral and treatment where this is required. This new document is to support the [NSS/S&F-1 Quality Assurance Policy Framework](#) and should be read in conjunction with screening programmes specific quality assurance standards. Next year we will continue to strengthen the procedures, processes and structures in place within the NSS.

We also reviewed and analysed our reporting and management of incidents completed on the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and QPulse (NSS Quality Management Information System) and are in the process of standardising our processes in line with the HSE incident management framework.

### Programme Standards:

CervicalCheck reviewed and published three chapters in their QA Standards

BowelScreen QA standards reviewed and published

BreastCheck and Diabetic RetinaScreen are progressing the review of their QA standards

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



## Finance

In 2023, our finance department set out to review our processes around investment planning and decision-making, to ensure we achieve the best value for money. The department completed a business process review of investment planning, business case development and approval processes. They also developed a new post-approval process, set up a procurement support group, ran staff webinars on the most frequently used National Financial Regulations (NFRs), and took a Finance 'question & answer roadshow' to all our units across the country.

## BowelScreen new edition of quality assurance standards

We have published a new edition of the [Standards for Quality Assurance in Colorectal Screening](#). It sets out the quality standards and requirements against which our BowelScreen programme is measured, including administration, the faecal immunochemical test (FIT), endoscopy, radiology, histopathology and treatment.

Quality assurance (QA) is the process of checking that standards are met and continuous improvement is encouraged. Each part of the screening process must be fully quality assured and monitored to ensure it adheres to the highest international standards and gives rise to the best possible outcomes. The QA committee for colorectal screening regularly monitors and measures its performance against these standards to make sure we are meeting our purpose.

The revised standards were reviewed and approved by a peer review panel including international experts and practitioners in the delivery of bowel cancer screening, endoscopy, radiology, histopathology and surgery.

The standards were recommended for approval by the Clinical Advisory Group in September 2023, and ratified by the Executive Management Team in November 2023.

We will carry out a formal review of the standards in line with our *QA Policy Framework* within a minimum of five years.

## NCRI report

We welcomed the publication of the [National Cancer Registry Ireland \(NCRI\) report - Breast, cervical and colorectal cancer 1994-2019: National trends for cancers with population-based screening programmes in Ireland](#).

The report details for the first time the positive impact of BowelScreen, BreastCheck and CervicalCheck on cancer detection in Ireland. There has been a noticeable increase in earlier diagnosis and a demonstrable reduction in mortality.

### The overall key findings show:

Cancers detected via screening were, on average, found at a much earlier stage in the screening age group than in the non-screening group.

- Decreases in mortality for the three cancers were, in general, more substantial in the age-groups eligible for screening.
- Survival is now higher and has improved more markedly in the screening age groups for all three cancers.
- Population cancer screening in Ireland is effective.

### Fiona Murphy, NSS Chief Executive said:

*"We can now confidently say that a portion of the improvements in cancer detection is directly attributable to CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and BreastCheck. The public can be reassured that our screening programmes are effective."*

## Enabling Priority 3

# Data and information

*We will use advances in information technology and data to inform and strengthen our service delivery, support evidence-based decision making and improve our efficiency.*



### SPOTLIGHT ON

**NSS Data Strategy**

**Information governance**

**NCRI/NSS Strategic Planning Group**

**Information and communication technology**

**Enhancing data quality**

**BreastCheck client and radiology system**

**CervicalCheck information system**

## NSS Data Strategy

Our Data Strategy is due for delivery in 2024. Becoming a 'data driven organisation' with a clear understanding of our data assets, the level of data maturity and how we can maximise the value of our data, will be key enablers in our ongoing planning and decision-making.

We began our Data Strategy project in 2023 by establishing a Project Steering Group and a Project Working Group to manage and oversee the project. We identified and engaged a contractor through the Office of Government Procurement Data Services framework. We held a business opportunities workshop in September involving internal departments and are creating an inventory of all data. We expect to complete a data assessment of identified data assets in early 2024.

We are confident that the output from these activities will outline the current state of data maturity within the NSS and lead to the development of a Data Strategy in 2024 that will outline how we get to a 'future/ desired state' of data maturity.

## Information governance

**Maintaining the confidentiality and integrity, and improving the availability of our information**

A HSE internal audit took place in 2023, which provided assurance around our strong General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance. We have provided comprehensive training to our appointed data champions and provided tailored training for programmes and functions in this area.

Work has started on the establishment of an information governance framework to comply with legislation and HIQA information management standards, and ensure that there is a consistent, coordinated approach to information governance in the NSS. This will ensure we have high quality data that is used safely and effectively for the people who choose screening and continue to ensure we are offering high-quality screening programmes.



## STRATEGY SNAPSHOT

### Setting up a network of data champions

Our data protection requirements demand that each programme, department and employee takes ownership of their data protection responsibilities and are supported by the NSS Information Governance office. To assist the department heads and programme managers in this work, the Information Governance team procured a data protection compliance platform called PrivacyEngine; and set up a network of 'data champions'.

Each programme manager or department head nominated an employee from within their team to act as the data champion for their group. Each data champion received additional data protection training and liaised with the information governance team to ensure that the personal data processing activities within their department are GDPR-aligned. This person acts as the point of contact with information governance, and helps to coordinate data protection compliance activities within their departments.

Specifically, some of their activities include generating and maintaining accurate records of all third parties who process personal data for their department; maintaining complete records of processing activities for their department; and acting as advocates for good information governance practices.

*Dr Eimhin Walsh:*

"The role of the information Governance (IG) office at the NSS includes supporting the programmes and departments in managing their compliance with data protection."

As part of our Data and Information priority, we are collaborating with our screening partners to identify opportunities for the exchange of data across platforms.

### NCRI/NSS Strategic Planning Group

One such example of this is our close working relationship with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland (NCRI) through the NCRI/NSS Strategic Planning Group. The group is focusing on the development of interval cancer rates for all three cancer screening programmes. Core to this development is the exchange and transfer of data between the two organisations; in particular between the NSS Programme and Evaluation Unit and the NCRI Cancer Intelligence and Data Integration teams.

This close and effective working relationship has resulted in the calculation of an updated BreastCheck interval cancer rate available up to 2018, and significant progress has been made to develop a post-colonoscopy colorectal cancer rate for BowelScreen, which is due to be completed in 2024.

### Information and communication technology

#### Import of HPV vaccination data

Our Information and Communication Technology (ICT) department is working on a project to enable the exchange of information and data across platforms. We are collaborating with the National Immunisation Office (NIO) to enable the sharing of HPV vaccination data. NIO import testing with HPV vaccination data is on schedule to be transferred early in 2024.

#### Individual health identifiers

Our ICT department is also working on bringing in the use of individual health identifiers (IHIs) across all screening programmes. Ultimately, for our screening population this will mean a more efficient system and it will help us to find our service user or patient records quickly. This will also mean:

- improved patient safety - reducing the risk of medical errors associated with incorrect patient records or treatments
- continuity of care - in time, the IHI will enable health records to be seamlessly accessible across the care continuum
- efficient healthcare operations - IHIs on patient records reduces administrative burdens, minimises duplication of efforts, and optimises resources
- eHealth applications are enabled and allow us to link patient records together from different systems.



At the time of publication, the approximate percentage of IHI matches within our programmes was:

- BowelScreen - 97.0%
- BreastCheck - 90.1%
- CervicalCheck - 97.6%
- Diabetic RetinaScreen - 88.1%.

### Horizon-scanning

As part of our horizon-scanning remit, the ICT department is reviewing innovation initiatives from within the HSE and external bodies to determine what we can adapt for the NSS. For example, we have explored telephony solutions to replace our existing EOL phone system.

### Developing predictive modelling

We are developing predictive models to assist capacity planning and forecasting by the end of 2025. Our Programme Evaluation Unit has been working on census comparisons with cancer screening register data and has completed the modelling of five-year projections for the three cancer screening programmes.

### Enhancing data quality

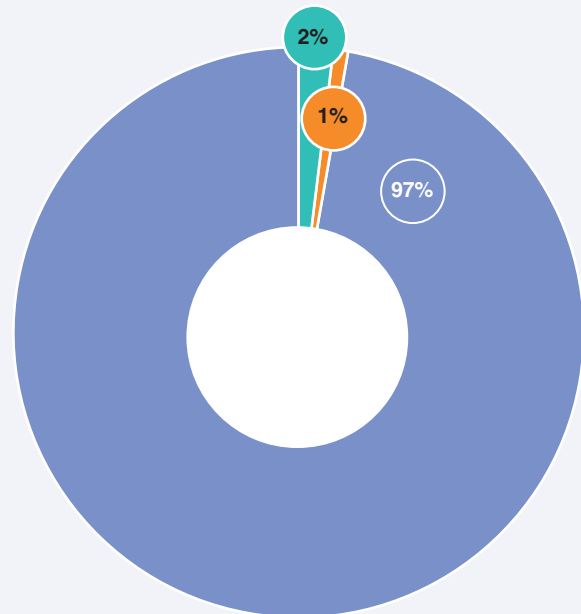
In 2023, the NSS began developing a data strategy. This involved compiling a data maturity assessment and a data quality assessment, as a precursor to identifying projects and actions to enhance the overall quality of information within the NSS.

The NSS's Information Governance Committee has also widened its remit to ensure it oversees the improvement of data quality.

### Appropriate and timely reporting of data breaches

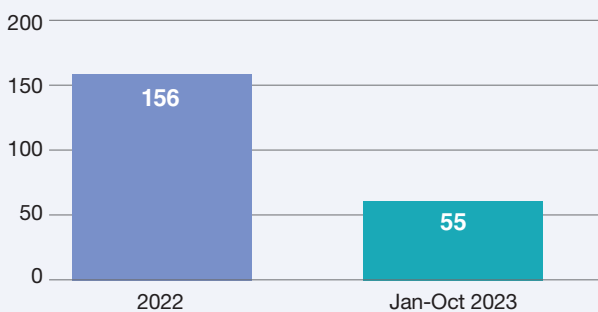
We have made progress in this area through the development and implementation of a training programme to ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to data breaches, and how to minimise the risk of them occurring. During 2023, we recorded 56 data breaches with 95% of them reported on time. 93% of incidents reported were managed and closed appropriately. In total, the NSS Information Governance department reviewed and managed a total of 2,392 incidents in 2023.

### Incidents notified to Information Governance team



- Breaches
- Non-breach incidents
- Letters opened in error

### Data breaches





## BreastCheck client and radiology information system\*

Over the last several years, and particularly in 2023, staff across BreastCheck have contributed to the design, development, testing and launch of our new client and radiology system, AIRE.

The name AIRE (which stands for Assessment, Information, Radiology and Evaluation) comes from the Irish meaning ‘to care’, and reflects the attention and compassion BreastCheck offers everyone who chooses to come for breast screening.

The aim of the AIRE system is to improve the breast screening pathway for our participants by enhancing our current processes and introducing future-proofed functionality. AIRE will ensure that our programme remains an accessible, supportive experience for the participants we work with.

Over 300 user scenarios have been documented with the help of staff from all areas of the programme including radiology, surgery, radiography, nursing, and administration. Each of these scenarios has contributed to the overall development of a system that not only keeps our best practice ways of working, but also looks for ways to continuously improve those practices.

Not only is AIRE a bespoke system developed specifically for and by BreastCheck staff, but it also centres the participant experience. It is configurable to deliver on future needs and a changing screening landscape. It will enable us to deliver a consistent, compassionate service that supports our aim of being at the forefront of developments in population screening programmes. The contributions of BreastCheck staff have made this system possible, and we are excited to see the vision come to life when the system goes live in 2024.

## CervicalCheck information system

This year, our CervicalCheck programme commenced the development of a similar information management system\* to enhance and support the cervical screening pathway. The primary focus this year has been the development of a current state operating model. In 2024, we intend to inform the market of the upcoming procurement project to replace the existing cervical screening register with a new system that supports every aspect of the programme.

Key to both initiatives is collaboration with our ICT colleagues.



\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment



# Meeting challenges

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Our plan for 2023 was ambitious in scope and was reflective of our commitment to improving population health. As outlined in the following table, we have made good progress in achieving our mission and vision.

However, the year was not without its challenges, from both the external and internal environments. Through taking a strategic approach to our work, we have been able to recognise and plan for the effect of these challenges, adapt our work processes, and keep our goals not yet achieved within sight.

Staff recruitment paused across many key grades and specialities in line with the HSE's recruitment policy in 2023. This impacted on our ability to increase capacity within the BreastCheck programme this year, and meant we were unable to meet our strategic aim of realigning service delivery with the key performance indicators defined in the programme's Charter\*.

And while we were successful in increasing the BowelScreen screening age range by one year to people aged 59, the recruitment policy affected our ability to further expand that age range, as per the commitment outlined in the *National Cancer Strategy 2017-26*. We see these challenges continuing throughout 2024. However, we are continuing to seek innovative solutions to our recruitment needs through the lifetime of our strategy.

Another challenge this year was the impact of the Forsa industrial action on our ability to report and monitor our colposcopy performance data. The industrial action had a knock-on impact of reporting performance at national HSE level. Elsewhere, the introduction of HPV testing and the attendant change in cervical screening intervals created [challenges and opportunities for more responsive forecasting of screening attendance](#).

Extended timelines for procurement processes impacted on the progress of some of our key large-scale projects, such as development of Cara, the new information management system for CervicalCheck. Despite this challenge to project timelines, the Cara project remains on track.

Our mission to improve population health is still challenged by the risk that mortality and morbidity will increase within the population if population-based screening programmes become unviable and services cease due to challenges in the legal environment. This risk produces uncertainty for internal and external stakeholders. Minimising this risk continues to require our sustained effort to maintain the confidence of the public and hence coverage; grow capacity to provide service delivery; and stabilise the cost of the programmes relative to value. We aim to report more on our work in these areas in 2024.

\* National Service Plan 2023 commitment

# Overall progress

This table demonstrates the progress made across our strategy actions in 2023 broken down by strategy goal.

## NSS Strategy Implementation Plan

### Overall Strategy RAG Summary Status 2023

	Priority	Gr	Am	R	B	G
1.	Engagement and Partnership	8	5	0	20	2
2.	Operational Excellence	20	4	1	3	1
3.	Service Development	6	3	3	4	6
4.	People and Culture	10	1	1	1	2
5.	Governance and Quality Assurance	16	2	2	7	3
6.	Data and Information	11	2	0	2	4
	<b>RAG Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>18</b>

### RAG Status Definition

Green	Amber	Red	Blue	Grey
Project is within planned scope, timelines, resources, and funding.	Project is not within planned scope, timelines, resources, or funding. Mitigation plans are in place.	Project is outside planned scope, timelines, resources, or funding <b>for 3 months or more</b> or a <b>serious risk</b> has been identified.	Complete.	Not due to commence or formally deferred.



# Conclusion

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Of the 150 actions outlined in our strategic implementation plan, we began the work of over 90% of the strategy actions and 25% of these were completed by the end of 2023. While the majority of our strategic actions are continuing on-track, we are also calling out challenges, encouraging flexibility and adapting our plans where necessary.

It has been a busy and fulfilling year, one that has encouraged ingenuity, agility and an openness to learning as we deliver on our projects and goals. Our strategy has proved to be an empowering and cohesive tool for our staff. This is evident in the way we have worked to complete our own goals and actions; and worked across teams and functions to meet the goals and objectives of our colleagues. We are keen to respect and grow this positive organisational culture – a key goal of the strategy – as we work through the remaining years of implementation.

In all this busyness, we keep present in our minds the real and important focus of all our work: improving the lives of the two million people in Ireland who are eligible for at least one of our national population screening programmes. Prevention and early recognition of disease is our mission; it is why we exist and is our motivation for our strategic work. We aim to offer excellence; increase trust and confidence in screening; address barriers that discourage people from attending these vital services; and enable more people to choose screening.

With the launch of our new corporate website in 2023 ([www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie)), we are transforming how we engage and communicate with the public and our stakeholders. Through our new website, we are reporting consistently on our activity, progress and performance. It is a key resource for all who are interested in keeping up to date with our progress in

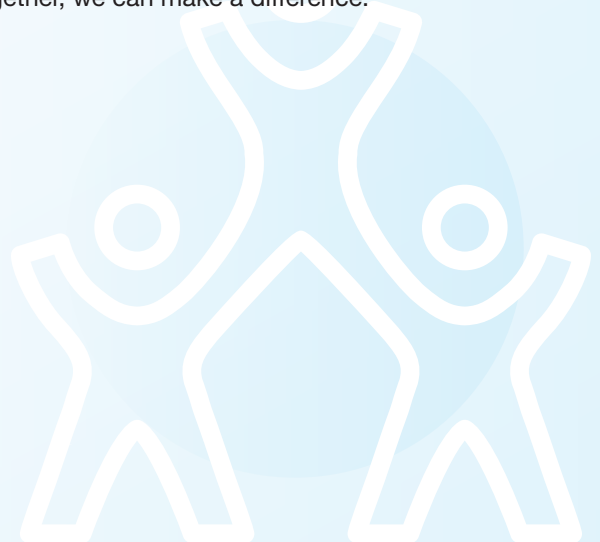
real-time throughout the year.

Our work in Year 1 of our strategy implementation shows our commitment to working with our screening participants, staff and stakeholders to improve outcomes for the populations we serve. We are building trust and confidence in healthcare through our strategic approach to providing a quality service in population screening.

As we enter Year 2 of our Strategy, we are renewing our commitment to following our mission and our vision in 2024, working together to save lives and improving people's health through population screening. We aim to do this in a way that recognises our challenges, and our opportunities to overcome them - including all future developments in screening and early detection of disease.

By focusing on meeting the needs of the people we care for, we will make full use of our research capacity, take advantage of the potential in new technologies and insights, develop the reach of our Patient and Public representatives within our decision-making, and strengthen our opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with our stakeholders at home and internationally.

Through our strategic approach to our work over the next four years, we will continue to strive towards providing equitable access to care and deliver improved health outcomes to the whole population. Together, we can make a difference.





An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service