



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

National Screening Service Research Strategy 2025-2027



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Glossary of terms

Choose Screening: *NSS Strategic Plan 2023-2027*

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

HIQA: Health Information and Quality Authority

HRB: Health Research Board

HSE: Health Service Executive – Ireland’s national health service

HTA: Health Technology Assessment – systematic evaluation of health technologies

NSAC: National Screening Advisory Committee

REC: Research Ethics Committee – providing independent ethical review of research proposals

RGMS: Research Governance, Management and Support function as defined in HSE research framework

RSF: Research Strategy Framework

PPI: Patient and Public Involvement in research design, conduct, and dissemination

Executive summary

We deliver 4 national screening programmes; 3 that screen for cancer, and 1 that screens for diabetic retinopathy. BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen together serve over 1.3 million eligible people per year. This research strategy supports our strategic plan, *Choose Screening – Together we can Make a Difference 2023-2027* by setting out our approach to leading and taking part in research over the period of our strategy. Its focus is improving outcomes for the people we serve, and makes sure that our research work is in line with the *HSE National Framework for Governance, Management and Support of Health Research*.

This strategy builds on our Research Strategy Framework (see Appendix 1) developed by our Research Committee for 2023-2027, which established 4 core research goals and 5 strategic priorities. The framework provides the strategic direction for our research. This strategy provides governance structures, partnership mechanisms, methods for building capacity, and implementation plans in line with HSE research governance requirements. The framework remains central and this strategy explains how we will deliver it.

Core research goals

Our research activities are structured around 4 goals that reflect our role to deliver Ireland's national population screening programmes:

1. **Promote visibility** of our screening programmes nationally and internationally through research collaboration and dissemination.
2. **Contribute** to the international screening literature through high-quality collaborative research partnerships.
3. **Facilitate** the use of anonymised screening data by external research partners working within appropriate governance frameworks.
4. **Inform feasibility research** on new screening developments to support National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) recommendations.

Strategic priorities

Implementation is guided by 5 strategic priorities that structure our research activities:

1. **Research programmes** that build on our expertise in screening delivery.
2. **Collaborations** that draw on academic and international partnerships.
3. **Staff development** that builds research capacity across our organisation.
4. **Wider HSE engagement** that connects screening research with broader health system priorities.
5. **Dissemination** that ensures research findings reach the right audiences and inform policy and practice decisions.

Research focus areas

We are concentrating our research activities on 4 priority areas:

1. Improving screening effectiveness and efficiency through screening programme improvements and quality indicator research.
2. Enhancing participation and equity in screening by addressing barriers and developing interventions for underrepresented groups.
3. Evaluating new screening technologies and pathways to support evidence-based policy decisions.
4. Maintaining high standards through quality assurance and programme evaluation research.

These priorities align with European initiatives including Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, European Health Data Space, and emerging artificial intelligence (AI) regulatory frameworks.

Implementation approach (2023-2027)

We will strengthen how research is governed by building on existing staff initiatives and collaborations. We'll follow HSE requirements, support staff to develop research skills through training and mentoring, and strengthen our research partnerships. We'll improve secure access to data to support collaboration, creating a strong foundation for ongoing research.

Expected outcomes

By the end of 2027, we will have further developed research governance frameworks, provided support to our staff who are active in research, and created further research partnerships with academic institutions. We will have maintained a portfolio of research studies and used this to inform screening policy and practice. We will measure our success by our number of partnerships, our contributions to screening literature and policy, and staff development.

Strategic positioning

This strategy strengthens our role as a valued research partner. It shows how we contribute screening expertise and provide high-quality data and service delivery insights to advance population screening science, while supporting staff to lead research within their current roles. By aligning our work with HSE research governance frameworks, European digital health initiatives, and international screening networks, we will ensure our research activities continue to meet the highest ethical and governance standards, and contribute meaningfully to evidence that improves screening programme effectiveness and population health outcomes.

The strategy ensures our research activities directly support our strategic vision of working together to save lives and improve people's health through population screening. It further enhances the reputation of the HSE National Screening Service as a recognised research-informed organisation and a valued contributor to international best practice in screening programmes, health equity and technology evaluation.

Our research strategy at a glance

Core screening research goals



Promote visibility
of our programmes



Contribute
to international literature



Facilitate
use of anonymised data



Inform
feasibility research

Strategic priorities



Research
programmes



Collaborations



Staff
development



Wider HSE
engagement



Dissemination
of research findings

Research focus areas for screening



Improving
effectiveness and
efficiency



Enhancing
participation and
equity



Evaluating new
technologies and
pathways



Maintaining high
standards through
quality assurance

In strengthening our research governance, we will:

- ✓ support staff to develop research skills through training and mentoring
- ✓ strengthen our research partnerships
- ✓ improve access to data to support collaboration.

By the end of 2027, we will have:

- ✓ further developed research governance frameworks
- ✓ provided support to our staff who are active in research
- ✓ enhanced our research partnerships with academic institutions
- ✓ used our research to inform screening policy and practice.

Our research strategy shows:

- ✓ our role as a valued research partner
- ✓ how we contribute to screening expertise
- ✓ how we provide high-quality data and service delivery insights to population screening science.

Our work aligns with:

- ✓ the HSE research governance frameworks
- ✓ European digital health initiatives
- ✓ international screening networks.

1. Introduction

1.1 About the National Screening Service

We deliver 4 national screening programmes serving an eligible population of over 1.3 million people annually. Our work is supported by mobile units, screening laboratories, diagnostic specialties, and a network of healthcare partners.

Since our establishment, we have built recognised expertise in screening programme development, implementation and delivery. We have contributed to international screening knowledge and practice while maintaining high-quality, participant-centred services guided by our HSE values of care, compassion, trust and learning.

1.2 Purpose of the research strategy

This strategy defines our approach to research participation, collaboration and leadership. It expands our Research Strategy Framework 2023-2027. It provides the detail on governance structures and implementation plans required by the *HSE National Framework for Governance, Management and Support of Health Research*.

Core research goals

Our research activities are structured around 4 goals that reflect our role as operator of Ireland's national population screening programmes:

1. **Promote visibility** of our screening programmes nationally and internationally through research collaboration and dissemination.
2. **Contribute** to the international screening literature through high-quality collaborative research partnerships.
3. **Facilitate** the use of anonymised screening data by external research partners working within appropriate governance frameworks.
4. **Inform feasibility research** on new screening developments to support National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) recommendations.



Strategic priorities

Implementation is guided by 5 strategic priorities that structure our research activities:

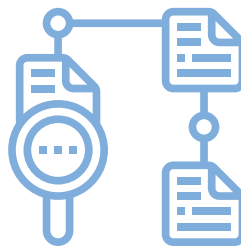
1. **Research programmes** that build on our expertise in screening delivery.
2. **Collaborations** that draw on academic and international partnerships.
3. **Staff development** that builds research capacity across our organisation.
4. **Wider HSE engagement** that connects screening research with broader health system priorities.
5. **Dissemination** that ensures research findings reach the right audiences and inform policy and practice decisions.



1.3 Alignment with national health priorities and frameworks

This strategy aligns with:

- the priorities of our strategic plan *Choose Screening: Together we can Make a Difference 2023-2027*
- the *HSE National Framework for the Governance, Management and Support of Health Research*
- Sláintecare's objectives for health system transformation
- the research priorities of the *National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026*
- the research and innovation pillars of *Europe's Beating Cancer Plan*
- the quality and innovation objectives of the *HSE Corporate Plan 2021-2024*.



2. Vision and mission

Our vision and mission put into practice the 4 research goals established in our Research Strategy Framework: promoting screening programme visibility, contributing to international literature, facilitating data sharing, and informing feasibility research for National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) recommendations. They are as follows:



2.1 Research vision statement

To be a leading research-informed organisation and valued research collaborator that contributes expertise, data and insights to improve population screening programmes and health outcomes for the people of Ireland.



2.2 Mission objectives

We participate in, contribute to, and lead high-quality research that:

- promotes the visibility of our screening programmes nationally and internationally
- contributes to the international screening literature through collaborative research
- informs screening policy and enhances programme effectiveness
- reduces health inequities and improves access to screening
- translates evidence into practice through strategic collaborations.

3. Strategic context

3.1 Landscape of population screening in Ireland

Ireland's screening programmes operate within a complex healthcare environment characterised by:

- 4 established national programmes with demonstrated impact on population health
- increasing eligible population due to demographic changes and programme expansion
- integration with cancer control pathways and other specialised treatment services
- strong partnerships with healthcare providers, academic institutions and international networks
- emphasis on person-centred care and health equity.

3.2 Key challenges and opportunities

Challenges include:

- health inequalities in screening participation
- integration of new technologies and evidence into practice
- data management and requirements for systems to work together.

Opportunities include:

- advances in screening technologies (AI, genomics, digital health)
- potential for new screening programmes and efficiencies in existing programmes
- advances in data analytics
- strengthened research partnerships and international collaborations.

3.3 Regulatory and policy environment

We operate within regulatory frameworks including:

- HSE governance and quality assurance frameworks
- Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements
- EU AI Act 2024
- European Commission quality guidelines and standards.



4. Research priorities

4.1 Improving screening effectiveness and efficiency

Objectives:

- Promote visibility of our programme performance and outcomes internationally.
- Set the most effective screening intervals, age ranges and population targeting.
- Evaluate screening pathway efficiency and quality indicators.
- Study long-term outcomes and programme impact.

Research areas:

- Programme monitoring and evaluation methodologies.
- International benchmarking and visibility studies.

4.2 Enhancing participation and equity

Objectives:

- Identify and address barriers to screening participation.
- Develop interventions to improve uptake in underrepresented groups.
- Evaluate communication strategies and health literacy approaches.
- Study participant experience and satisfaction.

Research areas:

- Health equity and access research.
- Behavioural science and health communication studies.
- Community engagement and outreach evaluation.
- Participant experience and patient-reported outcomes.

4.3 Evaluating new screening technologies and pathways

Objectives:

- Conduct research on the feasibility and acceptability of new screening programmes, to support National Screening Advisory Committee recommendations.
- Assess new screening technologies to see how useful they are to population health and how easy they are to implement.
- Evaluate new screening pathways and service delivery models.
- Participate in health technology assessments (HTA) for policy decisions (for example, HIQA Expert Advisory Group membership).

Research areas:

- Health technology assessment.
- Modelling studies on alternative screening programme pathways.
- Feasibility and acceptability studies for new screening approaches.

5. Governance and compliance

5.1 Alignment with HSE Research Governance Framework

Our research activities operate within the *HSE National Framework for Governance, Management and Support of Health Research* (2021), ensuring:

- compliance with research governance principles and procedures
- appropriate oversight of collaborative research participation
- clear description of roles and responsibilities in research partnerships
- adherence to HSE organisational policies and standards.

5.2 Research ethics and approval processes

For collaborative research:

- Continue to ensure all collaborative research has appropriate Research Ethics Committee (REC) approval from lead institution.
- Continue to verify that ethical oversight meets HSE standards before our participation.
- Continue to use clear data sharing and collaboration agreements.

For NSS-led research:

- Continue to obtain REC approval and Research Governance, Management and Support (RGMS) function approval as appropriate.
- Continue to follow HSE governance procedures for research initiation and oversight, supported by our information governance team.

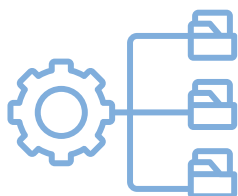
5.3 Data protection and GDPR compliance

- Continue to implement Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) for research activities.
- Continue to ensure compliance with Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR requirements.
- Use established secure data sharing agreements with research partners.
- Continue to maintain participant confidentiality and data security standards.



5.4 Risk management

- We integrate research risk management into existing organisational risk management frameworks rather than maintaining separate research risk registers. Research-specific considerations including ethical approval requirements, data access governance, and potential impacts on screening service delivery are monitored through our established risk management and incident reporting systems.



5.5 Research data governance

Research data management operates within our broader data governance frameworks while addressing specific requirements for research activities:

Data quality for research:

- Ensure data quality and integrity standards for research datasets.
- Implement validation procedures for research data extracts.
- Maintain documentation of data definitions and coding.

Data sharing governance:

- Develop data sharing policies and procedures for research collaboration.
- Establish data sharing agreements and protocols for external researchers.
- Create anonymised datasets for research collaboration while maintaining GDPR compliance.
- Develop data request and approval processes through our Research Committee oversight.



6. Research management and support

6.1 Implementation of RGMS function

- Continue and further develop research governance, management and support capabilities.
- Continue processes for research collaboration.
- Continue and further develop oversight mechanisms for ongoing research activities.
- Continue reporting and accountability structures.

6.2 Research registration and oversight

- Continue to maintain registry of all our research activities and collaborations.
- Continue to monitor compliance with governance requirements.
- Track research outputs and impact.
- Ensure proper closure and reporting of research activities.

6.3 Supporting capacity building and staff development

Objectives:

- Develop research skills and competencies among our staff at all levels.
- Provide comprehensive training on research methods, governance and ethics.
- Support academic partnerships and professional development opportunities.
- Build internal research culture and expertise across all programmes.
- Create pathways for staff to contribute to and lead research activities.

Implementation strategies:

- Establish research mentorship programmes.
- Provide funding for staff research training and education.
- Continue internal research seminars and knowledge sharing.
- Support staff participation in international conferences and networks.
- Integrate research competencies into role descriptions and development plans as appropriate.
- Continue and review the statistical advice and research analysis service regularly.

7. Collaboration and partnerships

7.1 Academic partnerships

Objectives:

- Strengthen strategic relationships with universities and research institutions.
- Develop formal collaboration agreements and frameworks.
- Support joint research proposals and funding applications.
- Facilitate staff exchanges and secondments.
- Create sustainable partnership models for long-term collaboration.

Key partnership areas:

- Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, University College Cork, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Galway and other Irish academic institutions.
- International universities with screening research expertise.
- International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).
- International Cancer Screening Network.

7.2 National and international collaborations

Supporting wider HSE engagement and international visibility:

National partnerships:

- Health Research Board (HRB) - collaborative research funding.
- academic and research institutions.
- National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) - integrated cancer research.
- National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) - data linkage and outcomes research.
- wider HSE engagement - community health, hospital groups, and specialty services.
- National Screening Advisory Committee - evidence provision for policy development/ recommendations.

International collaborations:

- European Commission Initiative on Breast Cancer (ECIBC).
- European Commission Initiative on Cervical Cancer (EC-CvC).
- European Cancer Information System (ECIS) - contribute to EU-wide cancer screening data and outcomes.
- international screening research organisations and working groups.
- World Health Organization and European Union research initiatives and policy development.
- The Digital Europe Programme - participate in AI and digital capacity building initiatives.
- European Partnership for Personalised Medicine - engage in precision screening research.
- bilateral research partnerships with international screening programmes.

8. Patient and public involvement in research

8.1 Patient and public involvement in NSS research

- Include patient and public representatives in the design of NSS-led research studies.
- Consult people in our eligible populations when setting research priorities.
- Involve patient and public representatives in reviewing research materials and consent processes.
- Ensure research questions reflect patient and public needs and concerns.

8.2 Research communication and dissemination

- Publish plain language summaries of completed research on our website.
- Share research findings with screening participants and stakeholder groups.
- Present research outcomes at participant fora and public events.
- Ensure timely communication of research results that may affect screening practice.

8.3 Building patient and public involvement capacity

- Provide training and support for staff engaging with patient representatives in research.
- Develop resources to facilitate meaningful patient and public involvement.
- Learn from patient and public involvement best practices in other international screening programmes.



9. Innovation and technology

9.1 Data management and analytics

Our research activities are supported by robust data governance and analytics capabilities, operating within section 6 of the Research Strategy Framework (Governance and Compliance).

9.2 Research priorities in data analytics

AI and advanced analytics (examples):

- Evaluate AI applications in screening test interpretation and risk stratification.
- Study machine learning algorithms for personalised screening pathways.
- Assess AI-assisted quality assurance and performance monitoring.
- Research digital biomarkers and predictive analytics for screening outcomes.
- Study human-AI interaction in screening decision-making.
- Assess public attitudes to AI use in screening programmes.

AI implementation is guided by European regulatory frameworks (EU AI Act and the European Health Data Space) and research ethics principles as detailed in Section 6.

9.3 Data sharing and collaborative research

We support the research community through established data sharing protocols that enable:

- external researcher access to anonymised screening data while maintaining GDPR compliance
- researcher understanding of our datasets and analytical approaches
- internal capacity building for data analysis among our research staff
- clear understanding of what that support includes.



10. Knowledge translation and impact

10.1 Implementation of research findings

Objectives:

- Develop systematic approaches to evidence implementation in our programmes.
- Create knowledge translation frameworks for screening practice.
- Support practice change and quality improvement initiatives.
- Monitor implementation outcomes and sustainability.
- Ensure research findings improve screening programme effectiveness.

10.2 Policy influence and guideline development

Objectives:

- Contribute to international screening literature through high-quality publications.
- Provide evidence-based proposals for modifications to existing services to National Screening Advisory Committee.
- Participate in national and international screening guideline development.
- Influence screening policy through research evidence.
- Support evidence-based decision-making at organisational and national levels.

10.3 Measuring and reporting research impact

Objectives:

- Promote visibility of our programmes through research dissemination.
- Track research outputs, outcomes, and societal impact.
- Communicate research achievements to stakeholders and public.
- Build reputation as a leading screening research organisation.

Sharing strategies:

- Publish in high-impact, peer-reviewed journals.
- Provision of support for open access publication.
- Present at national and international conferences.
- Develop policy briefs and practice recommendations.
- Engage with media and public communication.
- Create accessible plain language research summaries and blogs for stakeholders.
- Maintain research publications database and impact metrics.

11. Funding and resources

11.1 Collaborative funding opportunities

We identify and facilitate participation in collaborative research funding where we contribute expertise, data and operational insights as a partner rather than lead applicant.

11.2 Collaborative funding mechanisms:

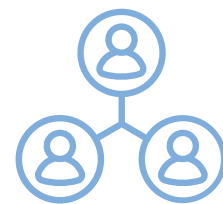
- Health Research Board (HRB) Applied Partnership Awards with academic institutions.
- EU consortium participation (Horizon Europe, EU4Health programme) where we are adopted as a partner.
- International collaborative research programmes in screening and cancer prevention.

We participate in research funding as:

- data and expertise contributor - providing screening programme data and operational insights
- collaborative partner - supporting academic-led research applications
- programme participant - engaging with European research networks where our expertise is relevant.

11.3 Resource allocation

- Allocate staff time strategically to support collaborative research participation.
- Balance research activities with core operational service delivery.
- Invest in research infrastructure and capabilities that support both research and operational excellence.



12. Research activity monitoring framework

We review research activities as part of improving quality and building evidence. These measures show that research is there to support our core screening work, not to act as a main organisational goal. We assess success based on programme improvements and the use of evidence, rather than the volume of research produced. We will monitor and report on the following research activities:

12.1 Activity indicators

Visibility and impact indicators:

- Publications contributing to international screening literature.
- Citations and academic impact of our research contributions.
- International conference presentations and speaking opportunities.
- Media coverage and policy influence of our research.

Collaboration indicators:

- Research collaborations established with academic and clinical partners.
- External partners accessing our anonymised screening data for research.
- Successful grant applications with partners (for example, HRB Applied Partnership Awards Awards).
- International network memberships and consortium participations.

Supporting capacity and development indicators:

- Staff research training completion and competency development.
- Research funding secured as lead applicant or collaborating partner.
- Staff participation in research activities and publications.

Programme and policy impact:

- Evidence of increased participation in our screening programmes.
- research recommendations implemented.
- Policy influence through research evidence and expert advice.
- Quality improvements attributed to research findings.

12.2 Evaluation framework

We will evaluate research activities through:

- systematic review of research outputs and activities
- assessment of progress against strategic objectives
- evaluation of research quality and programme impact.

12.3 Reporting and accountability

We are committed to transparent reporting of research activities, including:

- annual research reports to our Executive Management Team
- reporting of research activities through HSE governance structures
- communication of research achievements to screening programme stakeholders
- open sharing of research findings and their implications for screening practice.

13. Implementation Plan

This strategy covers the period 2025 to 2027. It will be implemented in stages, as follows:



13.1 2025 to 2026: Establish foundations

- Further develop research governance, management and support functions and research governance structures.
- Further develop data governance frameworks and sharing protocols.
- Further extend and initiate academic and healthcare partnerships.
- Begin AI evaluation research in BreastCheck.
- Launch staff research capacity-building programmes.



13.2 2026 to 2027: Strengthen and expand

- Expand collaborative research portfolio across all screening programmes.
- Continue to strengthen international research partnerships and networks.
- Scale AI implementation research across screening modalities.
- Share knowledge more clearly and more widely.
- Identify requirements, plan and commence advanced analytics capabilities.



13.3 2027: End-of-strategy evaluation

- Comprehensive evaluation of strategy delivery and outcomes.
- Assessment of research capabilities and partnerships developed.
- Review of research governance effectiveness.
- Stakeholder consultation to inform future research priorities.
- Recommendations for subsequent strategy period (2028 onwards).

The strategy will be monitored through the research activity monitoring framework detailed in Section 12, with a final review by mid-2028.

14. Critical success factors: enabling the wider HSE research system

Delivering our research strategy will depend on strong leadership, effective partnerships and the right skills and resources. It also requires a well-developed, consistent and nationally coordinated research system across the HSE.

As a national screening service, we work across different health regions and with universities, international partners and other stakeholders. To support this work, we need a research system that is safe, efficient, proportionate and consistent.

Achieving our research goals will depend on continued progress in national research infrastructure and governance. This work is being led through the HSE National Research and Development Office and the emerging HSE Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care Research.

The HSE National Research and Development team has identified the key supports needed to put our research strategy into practice.

These include:

- clear and consistent governance arrangements across all health regions. This will help ensure research is carried out safely, ethically and in line with national standards. It will also reduce regional differences and support research across multiple sites.
- a streamlined and nationally consistent Research Ethics Committee model. This will support timely ethical review of screening research while maintaining strong participant protections and public confidence.
- clear national guidance on the different pathways for knowledge-generating activities, including research, quality improvement, service evaluation, innovation, clinical governance and statutory public health functions. This will reduce confusion and delays, particularly for studies that involve multiple sites or organisations.
- timely access to national research office services, including contracting, finance, regulatory advice, project governance and operational support. This will help sustain delivery without duplicating specialist expertise.
- continued investment in specialist legal, data protection and information governance expertise. This is particularly important for data sharing agreements, Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) and legal reviews involving secondary use of data or multi-organisational projects.
- continued rollout of the National Electronic Research Management System. This will provide consistent processes for approvals, governance, oversight and reporting. It will also improve transparency and reduce administrative work.
- national guidance and shared standards for public and patient involvement. This will strengthen and support consistent practice across screening programmes and the wider health service.
- shared national templates for working with universities, research institutes and international partners. This will reduce time spent on negotiations, avoid duplication and strengthen our contribution to the international evidence base for screening.
- support for staff to take part in research through appropriate governance, capability development, protected time and access to specialist expertise.

15. Conclusion

This research strategy puts into effect our Research Strategy Framework 2023-2027 (See Appendix 1). The research goals and strategic priorities from that framework are supported in this document by the necessary HSE research governance requirements. The framework provides strategic direction; this strategy provides the means to deliver it.

This research strategy positions the HSE National Screening Service as a learning organisation that uses evidence to continuously improve our services and population health outcomes. Through strategic research collaborations, research leadership, and commitment to translating evidence into practice, we will contribute to advancements in population screening while delivering on our strategic vision - to work together to save lives and improve people's health.

The strategy recognises that good screening research is not only about publications, it demands meaningful contributions to the evidence base that informs screening policy and improves programme effectiveness. As operators of Ireland's 4 national screening programmes we bring operational insights, high-quality data, and implementation experience to research collaborations. We are a valuable partner for academic institutions, international screening networks, and policy-making bodies seeking evidence-based solutions to screening challenges.

Our approach emphasises our primary role as a research collaborator while building capacity for selective research leadership in areas where our expertise is most valuable. The core research goals promoting programme visibility internationally, contributing to screening literature, facilitating data sharing with external partners, and conducting feasibility research for the National Screening Advisory Committee, reflect our commitment to both supporting the broader research community and fulfilling our responsibilities as a national screening service provider.

The 5 strategic priorities in this strategy ensure research skills and capacity are well developed. Research programmes built on operational expertise will generate evidence directly relevant to screening practice. Collaborative partnerships will draw on academic and international networks to strengthen the impact of our research. Staff development initiatives will build our research culture and skills. Wider HSE engagement will connect screening research with broader healthcare priorities and digital initiatives. We will share research findings with appropriate audiences to inform policy decisions at national and international levels.

Implementation success will require sustained commitment to research excellence while maintaining operational priorities. The strategy's alignment with the HSE Research Governance Framework ensures appropriate oversight and ethical compliance. Integration with European digital health initiatives, including compliance with the EU AI Act and participation in the European Health Data Space, positions us to contribute to improvements in screening practice across Europe, while maintaining the highest standards of data protection and participant privacy.

This strategy supports us in becoming a recognised leader worldwide in screening research collaboration. Success will be measured not only through traditional academic metrics but through demonstrated impact on screening programme effectiveness, policy influence at national and European levels, and improved health outcomes for Irish and international populations. The evidence generated through this research strategy will inform the next generation of screening programmes, support the development of innovative technologies, and contribute to global efforts to reduce cancer mortality and improve early detection of disease.

By making research part of our organisational culture while maintaining a strong focus on delivering high-quality services, we will meet our dual role as both a high-performing screening provider and an active member of the international research community. This approach ensures that our research activity supports our mission to save lives and improve population health through evidence-based screening programmes that serve the needs of all communities.

We are well positioned to make a significant contribution to Ireland's health research ecosystem through high-quality screening research, data-enabled research, international collaboration and evidence-informed service improvement. Achieving these ambitions will be strengthened by the continued development of the HSE's national research infrastructure, governance systems and enabling supports.

The implementation of the HSE Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care Research will provide many of the core organisational capabilities required to enable us to deliver our Research Strategy safely, efficiently and consistently, ensuring that screening research continues to improve policy, practice and outcomes for the population.



Appendix 1

Research Strategy Framework 2023-2027

National Screening Service Research Strategy 2023-2027

The aims of the National Screening Service (NSS) Research Strategy 2016-2020 have been fulfilled, with a number of new collaborations, an increase in our European involvement and impact, and increased dissemination through several publications annually, presentations at national and international conferences and the initiation of NSS Research Seminars to highlight our research to staff and stakeholders.

The NSS Research Committee sits three times per year; the committee reviews the research starting or progressing in each of the functions and programmes.

Research Governance

The chair of the Research Committee reports to the NSS CEO. The Research Committee has membership from across the organisation with representation from all four screening programmes. Planned research involving the NSS is documented and discussed at the meetings or with the Chair between meetings.

Research goals 2023-2027

The goals of NSS research are as follows:

1. To promote the visibility of the four NSS population screening programmes both nationally and internationally.
2. To contribute to the international screening literature.
3. To facilitate the use of anonymised screening data (open data) by external partners working with the NSS.
4. To conduct research regarding feasibility or acceptability of new screening developments, mindful that major policy decisions are approved ultimately by the National Screening Advisory Committee in the Department of Health.

Strategic Priorities 2023-2027

Our goals will be achieved by focusing on five sets of strategic actions under the headings of Research Programmes, Collaborations, Staff Development, wider HSE engagement and Dissemination

Research Programmes

Strategic Action 2.1	Identify key policy issues within each programme where research could provide evidence for action
Strategic Action 2.2	Engage with international partners for policy action
Strategic Action 2.3	Engage with national partners for attendance promotion research
Strategic Action 2.4	Identify appropriate funding opportunities for the NSS to conduct research with existing and new partners
Strategic Action 2.5	Where appropriate, continue the current policy of commissioned research

Collaborations

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| Strategic Action 2.1 | Continue current collaboration and explore further opportunities for collaboration with our hospital colleagues |
| Strategic Action 2.2 | Continue engagement with current existing national research partners |
| Strategic Action 2.3 | Explore opportunities for further collaborative research with relevant charities |
| Strategic Action 2.4 | Continue contribution to the European Commission Initiative on Breast Cancer (ECIBC) updating of guidelines & publications |
| Strategic Action 2.5 | Continue work on setting of European targets and standards with the ECIBC monitoring and evaluation subgroup |
| Strategic Action 2.6 | Review the provision of placements to students and formulate policy surrounding |

Staff Development

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Strategic Action 3.1 | The NSS should continue to support training courses or further education for staff in epidemiology, research methods and analytical techniques |
| Strategic Action 3.2 | Those staff undertaking research within the NSS should have appropriate support from the initiation, to decide on ethics issues, audit designation methods and analysis |

Wider HSE Engagement

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Strategic Action 4.1 | Continue to engage with the NSS Information Governance function to ensure all research activity is in line with the data governance requirements. |
| Strategic Action 4.2 | Continue to engage with all HSE information pertaining to national research ethics initiatives and how they relate to the NSS |
| Strategic Action 4.2 | Contribute annually to HSE collation of published abstracts |

Dissemination

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| Strategic Action 5.1 | Promote publishing in open access journals to increase reach |
| Strategic Action 5.2 | Identify suitable medical/scientific conferences to present research |
| Strategic Action 5.3 | Continue Research Seminars for education and awareness of NSS research |
| Strategic Action 5.4 | Utilise social media and NSS website to promote and highlight our research |
| Strategic Action 5.5 | Annual presentation on NSS research to Executive Management Team |

Appendix 2

Relevant policies and guidelines

HSE National Framework for Governance, Management and Support of Health Research (2021)

Choose Screening: NSS Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Data Protection Act 2018 (Section 36(2)) Health Research Regulations

HSE Code of Governance

European screening quality guidelines

EU AI Act - Regulatory framework for artificial intelligence applications

European Health Data Space Regulation - Cross-border health data sharing

European Commission - digital services in health and care

European Commission - Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

European Medicines Agency (EMA) Artificial Intelligence



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service