



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

# Working to reduce inequity in screening

**National Screening Service 2022**

Compiled by the Public Health Department



**The National Screening Service (NSS) aims to address inequitable access to, or experience of screening. We work with communities to enable greater participation in population screening programmes. Equity is a key priority for us in Choose Screening, our Strategic Plan for the National Screening Service 2023-2027.**

**Health inequities are differences in health status between population groups that are avoidable and unfair. Health is influenced by a range of factors including social factors i.e. education, employment, income level, gender and ethnicity.**

People that experience disadvantage (for example, lower socio-economic groups) are more likely to experience poorer health. People in lower socio-economic groups who would benefit most from screening, are often the least likely to participate.

Screening primarily benefits those at most risk. If these groups are less likely to take up screening, it means that they don't reap the potential benefits (e.g. early diagnosis) and this may change the balance of benefits and harms across the entire population. This can lead to a screening programme that has reduced effectiveness.

This is a brief description of the work to improve equity in screening across the four programmes (CervicalCheck, BreastCheck, BowelScreen, Diabetic RetinaScreen) and the supporting functions including the Programme Evaluation Unit, Communications Department, Public Health Department, the IT Department, Quality, Safety and Risk Management, Strategy and Business planning and Client Services.

Our goal in NSS is to develop a strategic framework to improve equity in screening by 2024. This will lead to better co-ordination of the work across the screening service by identifying priority areas to focus on for the next 5 years. It will build on, and be informed by, the collective work we have undertaken to date to reduce inequities. Throughout 2022 and 2023 we have been consulting internally and externally with our stakeholders, including screening participants, reviewing evidence and research and collaborating with an advisory group to co-produce a framework to improve equity. We aim to publish our framework in mid-2023 and to develop a plan for implementation, along with appropriate governance structures, to ensure delivery of improvements. We will report on the first year of implementation in 2024.

For each piece of work if you would like additional information, please use the contact or link provided.

Strategic work area	Brief Description
<b>1. Strategy</b>	
<p><b>Development of a Strategic Framework to improve Equity in Screening</b></p> <p><b>All programmes</b></p>	<p>One of our strategic objectives is to improve equity and participation in our screening programmes to reduce health inequities. By the end of 2024, we will have developed a framework to improve equity in screening. This will further build on the initiatives already progressed in the National Screening Service.</p> <p>In 2022, the Public Health Team started collaborating with internal NSS stakeholders and external partners to co-produce a Strategic Framework to improve Equity in Screening. Building on the expertise of addressing inequities in health services and on the literature/ evidence-base, the strategic direction for work to improve equity across the four NSS programmes for the next five years will be determined. The Framework will be published in Q2, 2023.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Pheena.kenny@screeningservice.ie">Pheena.kenny@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Cervical Cancer Elimination</b></p>	<p>The NSS, in partnership with National Immunisation Office, National Cancer Control Programme, National Cancer Registry of Ireland, the Department of Health and other stakeholders, is working towards the World Health Organisation global targets for cervical cancer elimination.</p> <p>During 2022, the Public Health team worked with researchers in the Daffodil Centre, Australia to collate Irish data in order to model the date we in Ireland can expect to eliminate cervical cancer i.e. reduce incidence of cervical cancer to less than four cases per 100,000 women years. The results of the modelling is expected in 2023 and the focus for the year will be setting an elimination date, publishing the Roadmap and developing the action plan, where equity will be a key theme.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Estelle.mclaughlin@screeningservice.ie">Estelle.mclaughlin@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

Strategic work area	Brief Description
<b>2. Research and Data</b>	
<b>LGBT+ CervicalCheck research implementation</b>	<p>Following publication of the research findings in 2021, implementation of the recommendations commenced in CervicalCheck. A number of initiatives have been implemented in 2022 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A quick reference guide for sampletakers working with the LGBT+ community has been published</li> <li>• LGBT+ awareness training for our CervicalCheck staff</li> <li>• Webinars for sampletakers on LGBT+ inclusion in cervical screening and good practice in supporting the trans community were delivered</li> <li>• A dedicated point of contact for the LGBT+ community in CervicalCheck</li> <li>• Wide dissemination of the findings of the research through various publications</li> <li>• Website updated to include information for the LGBT+ community</li> <li>• The NSS Patient and Public Partnership (PPP) has more inclusivity, with representation from the LGBT+ community.</li> </ul> <p>We continue to strive to implement all recommendations in the research and continue to collaborate with our colleagues from the LGBT+ community.</p> <p>In 2022 we were delighted to be nominated for an Irish healthcare award in recognition of this work.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie">Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie</a>  <a href="https://www.screeningservice.ie/publications/LGBT+Cervical-Screening-Study-Report.pdf">https://www.screeningservice.ie/publications/LGBT+Cervical-Screening-Study-Report.pdf</a></p>
<b>BowelScreen Research</b>	<p>There are two pieces of research in collaboration with Dublin City University, and The Irish Cancer Society, to understand reasons why men and women don't attend bowel screening. To develop interventions to overcome barriers.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking a systematic review of evidence to date.</li> <li>• Developing behavioural intervention and establish protocols with BowelScreen to include a test kit and behavioural intervention with the screening reminder,</li> <li>• Investigating the efficacy of the interventions in improving uptake in a pilot randomised controlled trial.</li> </ul> <p>This second piece of research includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding workshops with stakeholders to explore ways to improve uptake</li> <li>• Developing enhanced messaging to improve uptake</li> <li>• Piloting a trial of materials within BowelScreen.</li> </ul> <p>Blog  <a href="https://www.screeningservice.ie/news/news.php?idx=306">https://www.screeningservice.ie/news/news.php?idx=306</a></p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:peu@screeningservice.ie">peu@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<p><b>Breaking Down Barriers: An Assessment of the Needs of Disabled People in Accessing Population-Based Screening Services in Ireland</b></p> <p><b>All programmes</b></p>	<p>The NSS wants to understand to what capacity disabled people in Ireland can benefit from its services. We want to understand unmet needs and the current lived experience of those using our services. It is important to understand the delivery of services and the effectiveness of that model of delivery for service users.</p> <p>The aim of this needs assessment is to: Collect and analyse information and data on the experience and participation of disabled people in screening and assess the gaps between screening service delivery and the potential participation of disabled people.</p> <p>In 2022 we worked with Dublin City University (DCU) to complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A literature review</li> <li>• A Patient and Public Partnership Panel</li> <li>• A consultation with people with disabilities</li> <li>• A report summarising the research findings</li> <li>• Recommendations for improvements to the NSS programmes</li> </ul> <p><b>For more information</b> <a href="mailto:Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie">Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Self-sampling cervical screening</b></p>	<p>Meta-analysis has shown that self-sampling can improve uptake of cervical cancer screening in under-screened and never-screened population groups. A mixed-methods research project has been planned to explore the role that self-sampling for HPV testing might play in the delivery of cervical screening in Ireland. The first phase of the project includes a quantitative survey of women and people with a cervix aged 20-65 in Ireland to assess their beliefs and attitudes towards self-sampling and to determine their intention to use it if it became available. Researchers will be appointed to carry out this work by the end of 2022, with completion of the study in 2023.</p> <p>Blog <a href="https://www.screeningservice.ie/news/news.php?idx=307">https://www.screeningservice.ie/news/news.php?idx=307</a></p> <p><b>For more information</b> <a href="mailto:publichealth.support@screeningservice.ie">publichealth.support@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<b>CervicalCheck research</b>	<p>Collaborating with Cerviva Research Consortium. The aim is to understand what influences cervical screening uptake in older women and how screening programmes can translate this knowledge into behaviour changing strategies.</p> <p>A mixed-methods research design is being used. Phase 1 involved a qualitative interview study which explored the potential influences on, barriers to, and enablers of, cervical screening participation among women in Ireland. This has been published here <a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hex.13346">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hex.13346</a></p> <p>Informed by the findings from Phase 1, Phase 2 involves a quantitative cross-sectional survey which will identify the most important influences on screening participation among older women and inter-relationships between these influences.</p> <p>The findings from Phases 1 and 2 will be combined in a behavioural analysis to form evidence-based solutions to the problem of low screening coverage in older women.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:peu@screeningservice.ie">peu@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>Geocoding the Cervical Screening Register</b>  <b>NSS/Health Intelligence Unit</b>	<p>NSS has been working with HSE Health Intelligence Unit to geocode (add location/geographic information) the Cervical Screening Register. This will help NSS improve service delivery and planning by understanding any geographical differences in screening. This can also be compared with other information e.g., deprivation to improve equity of services.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Estelle.mclaughlin@screeningservice.ie">Estelle.mclaughlin @screeningservice.ie</a>  <a href="mailto:peu@screeningservice.ie">peu@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>NSS - NCRI Collaborative Group</b>	<p>The NSS and the NCRI have been strengthening their collaboration over the last four years. The purpose is to ensure that we have a good picture of the relationship between cancer and screening and any areas of inequity. The work has focused on setting up well-governed arrangements to share data. This collaboration is now setting up processes to calculate interval cancer rates for each of the programmes. This will be a regular piece of work for the NSS and NCRI.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Sinead.woods@screeningservice.ie">Sinead.woods@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<p>NIO HPV Immunisation Data Transfer</p>	<p>The NSS and the National Immunisation Office are working together to make sure that HPV vaccination status is linked to screening records. HPV vaccination lowers the risk of cervical cancer and so in the future we will need to adapt our screening programme to take this into account. In time, the data-linking will help make better screening recommendations for individuals as well as help us adapt the programme as the percentage of people who are at a lower risk of cervical cancer increases. In time, it will allow the impact of HPV immunisation on cervical screening outcomes to be measured. This project is part of the larger cervical cancer elimination project. We hope to use this data to inform our equity work into the future.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Sinead.woods@screeningservice.ie">Sinead.woods@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<p>NSS health equity measurement</p>	<p>Evidence suggests that socially at-risk individuals receive lower-quality health care and experience worse health outcomes than more-advantaged individuals.</p> <p>A health equity measurement approach should, ideally, be based on measures on which disparities in care are known to exist for certain populations. It should reflect available evidence on the relationship between a social risk factor and health or health care outcome; and capture information about small subgroups where possible.</p> <p>During 2022 the NSS commenced a review of a standardised set of variables and defined values collectively known as equity stratifiers, within the screening healthcare record in the NSS BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, BowelScreen and Diabetic RetinaScreen programmes.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:publichealth.support@screeningservice.ie">publichealth.support@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<b>3. Education, Learning and Development</b>	
<p><b>E-learning module</b></p> <p><b>Breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening</b></p>	<p>The National Screening Service has developed an e-learning module on screening. This is part of a suite of e-learning modules being developed by the National Cancer Control Programme on 'Reducing Cancer Risk' for health and social care professionals. The programme will consist of 11 short course modules on modifiable cancer risk factors. Each module takes 10-15 minutes to complete.</p> <p>The aim of the screening module is to have a simple and user-friendly e-learning module describing screening and the three cancer-related screening programmes in Ireland and to support health and social care professionals to support people to participate in screening. We envisage that community health workers will undertake this module and share their knowledge with service users they come in contact with, acting as screening advocates.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:health.promotion@screeningservice.ie">health.promotion@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<p><b>NALA training for NSS communication and public health teams</b></p>	<p>Plain English training delivered by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was organised by the Information Hub team to enhance the skills of NSS staff who create and review content for the organisation.</p> <p>NALA provides professional services to help organisations to be more accessible to people with unmet literacy, numeracy or digital literacy needs.</p> <p>The first workshop took place in April 2022 for 15 NSS staff members with an additional homework session/assignment for this group which took place later that week.</p> <p>The training sessions covered the basics of plain English, language guidelines used for editing content, and page design.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:communications@screeningservice.ie">communications@screeningservice.ie</a></p>



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<b>4. Accessibility and Inclusion</b>	
<b>BreastCheck translated information</b>	<p>The NSS in partnership with Translate Ireland produced multilingual video messages for migrant communities on BreastCheck screening.</p> <p>The video messages are available in 25 languages and are presented by doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals in Ireland who come from another country originally.</p> <p>The video messages explain the importance of screening and what it entails, and it informs people on where and how they will be screened. The scripts for the video messages are culturally appropriate and clearly explain information which may be difficult for migrants to understand in English.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:communications@screeningservice.ie">communications@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>Diabetic RetinaScreen translated information</b>	<p>The NSS worked with Translate Ireland to produce multilingual video messages for migrants on Diabetic RetinaScreen screening.</p> <p>The video messages, which are available in a number of languages, are presented by doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals in Ireland who come from another country originally.</p> <p>The video messages explain the importance of screening and what it entails, and it informs people on where and how they will be screened. The scripts for the video messages are culturally appropriate and clearly explain information which may be difficult for migrants to understand in English.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:communications@screeningservice.ie">communications@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>BreastCheck Access</b>	<p>The BreastCheck access team met four times in 2022 to discuss specific access issues for disabled people accessing our BreastCheck service. A large piece of work for 2022 was reviewing the induction loop systems (use by those with hearing impairments) available in all our units and updating as requiring.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:access@breastcheck.ie">access@breastcheck.ie</a></p>
<b>Equity Tool Cancer screening, risk reduction and early diagnosis</b>	<p>In 2022 we developed an Equity Tool for use in the community. This consolidates information about risk reduction, screening and early diagnosis into one interactive document. It's easy to use and gives practical guidance on supporting communities to reduce inequity in cancer. The tool aims to support community workers to promote participation in screening by collating the resources they may need in one place and by directing them to supports available for service users.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie">Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<b>5. Communication</b>	
<b>Breast Cancer Prevention and early detection information for the screened population</b>	<p>In 2022, the NSS Public Health Department and BreastCheck in partnership with the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP), developed a leaflet to provide women with information about breast cancer prevention and early detection information for the screened population. This leaflet aims to help women to make informed decisions about their breast health, including attending their screening appointment. The leaflet details easy practical steps women can take with helpful tips and links for further information. The leaflet will be used as a resource by BreastCheck, Breast Unit staff, GPs, health professionals and the public.</p> <p><a href="https://www.screeningservice.ie/publications/Breast-cancer-prevention-and-early-detection-information-for-the-screened-population.pdf">https://www.screeningservice.ie/publications/Breast-cancer-prevention-and-early-detection-information-for-the-screened-population.pdf</a></p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.meade@screeningservice.ie">Kathryn.meade@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>NSS Information Hub</b>	<p>The NSS Public Health and Communications Teams are working together improve how communications content is developed, approved and disseminated. Content is now being developed in a standardised way through collaborating with patients, the public, subject matter experts and clinicians. Plain English/ NALA guidelines are also applied to content to ensure that information is accessible and easy to understand. The Hub is playing a key role in reducing communication barriers for service users.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:communications@screeningservice.ie">communications@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>Behavioural science research project</b>	<p>We are partnering with the Economic and Social Research Institute to use behavioural science methods to develop strategic guidance on transparent &amp; pragmatic communication materials that fully explain the benefits, limitations &amp; harms of cervical screening.</p> <p>The project is aimed at helping people take positive action in choosing screening, in a space where they are fully informed of the further choices the decision to take up screening can bring.</p> <p>The project's aim is to further develop the informed consent processes across the four national screening programmes, and embed the patient experience in our information materials to greater aid understanding of screening.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:communications@screeningservice.ie">communications@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<b>6. Partnership</b>	
<b>Easy read project Diabetic RetinaScreen</b>	<p>We commenced a project in 2022 to make information about Diabetic RetinaScreen easy read.</p> <p>Information such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About Your Diabetic Retina Screen</li> <li>• About 2 yearly screening</li> <li>• About Digital Surveillance</li> </ul> <p>will all be available in plain English, easy read and photo story once the project is completed.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie">Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>Easy read project BreastCheck assessment</b>	<p>The work on this project has commenced and will be completed in 2023. We will pictorially show the patient journey through a BreastCheck assessment appointment from start to finish.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie">Lynn.swinburne@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>Pavee Point bowel and breast screening projects</b>	<p>The Traveller Health Project</p> <p>Pavee Point, NSS and NCCP aims to address the cancer prevention, early detection and screening needs of the Traveller community, in the Finglas and Blanchardstown area of CHO 9, building upon previous cancer risk reduction work. In 2022, Primary Health Care Workers received training and support in BowelScreen and BreastCheck to provide cancer prevention, early detection, and screening messages to their community.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.meade@screeningservice.ie">Kathryn.meade@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<b>Partnership with CHO 9 All programmes</b>	<p>Public Health in the NSS and Health &amp; Well Being, HSE, Dublin North City and County (DNCC) are working collaboratively to develop initiatives to support people in DNCC to avail of screening. In 2022, the NSS delivered 2 screening webinars for staff in DNCC to provide them with information on screening and how to support people they come in contact with to avail of screening.</p> <p>In addition, the NSS also provided a webinar for staff on the screening service and how they themselves can avail of screening. All webinars were evaluated and the feedback from the webinars has supported the development of the equity tool and screening e-learning module.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.meade@screeningservice.ie">Kathryn.meade@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

Strategic work area	Brief Description
<p><b>NSS Patient and Public Partnership (PPP) Strategy</b></p>	<p>As we come to the final year of the PPP strategy lifespan we are working to fully embed the function within NSS operations and business. A permanent PPP Committee is being established to ensure that PPP is a routine part of NSS business, and operational processes and to provide oversight and governance for PPP projects and activities across NSS, and to ensure a person-centred culture within NSS.</p> <p>The PPP Implementation Group has been working with the NSS Strategy Business &amp; Projects (SBP) department to formalise a process to embed Public and Patient Partnership (PPP) involvement in the development of the National Screening Service (NSS) strategy implementation plan 2023 and to finalise a systematic approach to setting annual priorities for PPP activities.</p> <p>Throughout 2022, the PPP Network has worked on a variety of NSS projects including: NSS Corporate Strategy development, Info Hub, Strategic Equity Framework development, Cervical Cancer Elimination Project, the Expert Reference Group (ERG) and Interval Cancer (IC) Groups.</p> <p>As we move into the final year of the strategy, we launched a PPP recruitment campaign to ensure we have an inclusive and diverse PPP Network that represent the people using our services.</p> <p>PPP will also remain an important objective in the new NSS Corporate Strategy and we will continue to monitor and evaluate our work to help strengthen how we work with our partners.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:PPPlead@screeningservice.ie">PPPlead@screeningservice.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Smoking Cessation and Colposcopy Cervical screening</b></p>	<p>A pilot project is being scoped between CervicalCheck, representatives from colposcopy clinics and Tobacco Free Ireland to consider embedding a smoking cessation referral mechanism to the IT systems within Colposcopy Services. The initial phase of the project will involve surveying staff in colposcopy clinics about current practice in relation to smoking cessation communications with patients, whether staff have engaged in brief interventions training and whether additional educational materials (e.g. posters/ leaflets) may be helpful. The outcomes of the survey will inform what is included in the project pilot and whether the project will be piloted across all colposcopy sites or otherwise.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:Pheena.kenny@screeningservice.ie">Pheena.kenny@screeningservice.ie</a></p>

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<b>BowelScreen Patient Reported Experience Measurement survey (PREMs) project</b>	<p>A key part of our PPP strategy is trying to understand what it feels like to use our services and what gets in the way. A specific action for the PPP strategy is “to incorporate routine patient feedback and patient experience surveys into annual business and quality improvement”.</p> <p>NSS launched the Pilot BowelScreen Patient Experience Survey (PREMs) in April 2022. The survey gathers real time feedback from screening participants and explores their experience at each stage of the BowelScreen journey. The purpose of the survey is to capture what our patients think of our services quickly, easily, and to learn from their feedback. Their responses provide us with information on how well we communicate, the standard of our service and help identify where improvements can be made across the programme including our colonoscopy units.</p> <p>As a result of the success of this pilot, and subject to a successful tender, the PREMs programme is scheduled to be implemented across BreastCheck in 2023.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:bcs001@bowelscreen.ie">bcs001@bowelscreen.ie</a></p>

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<b>7. Service Provision</b>	
<b>Diabetic RetinaScreen pregnancy pathway</b>	<p>In November 2022 we began piloting a new pregnancy pathway which provides extra screening for women with diabetes who become pregnant. The pathway has received funding from the Women’s Health Task Force. The pilot is in the Dublin region, with a view to expanding the pilot nationally in 2023.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:info@diabeticretinascreen.ie">info@diabeticretinascreen.ie</a></p>
<b>BreastCheck new mobile units</b>	<p>BreastCheck has met the many challenges posed by COVID-19 while working to increase capacity and uptake. Our focus on increasing uptake included establishing three new BreastCheck mobile units, which will have the effect of increasing capacity to drive uptake. All three new mobiles are now commissioned and in service.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:info@breastcheck.ie">info@breastcheck.ie</a></p>
<b>BreastCheck offers final breast screening to women who turned 70 during 2020 and 2021</b>	<p>BreastCheck invites all women for screening at regular intervals between the ages of 50 and 69. However, breast screening was impacted by COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 and appointments have been delayed by up to a year. Some women who were aged 69 and due a screening test in 2020 or 2021 may have turned 70 before we could invite them for their final screen. We are now writing to these women to invite them for this screen.</p> <p>You can read more about it <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p><b>For more information</b>  <a href="mailto:info@breastcheck.ie">info@breastcheck.ie</a></p>



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