

European Commission
COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on strengthening prevention through early detection:
A new EU approach on cancer screening

An Irish perspective
7 October 2022

1. Background

- On 20 September 2022, the European Commission published a new Council Recommendation outlining 'a new EU approach to cancer screening'. It has the aim to help Member States to ensure that 90% of the EU population who qualify for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings are offered such screening by 2025.
- The new recommendation expands population-based organised cancer screening to include lung, prostate and, under certain circumstances, gastric cancers ¹.

2. Introducing modifications or new screening programmes in Ireland

- The National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) was established in 2019 as an independent advisory body with the specific remit to advise on all new proposals for population-based screening programmes and revisions to existing programmes.
- If the NSAC makes a recommendation to the Minister for Health to introduce a new programme it will then fall to the Health Service Executive (HSE) to commence the business planning process that will signal the implementation of the new programme.
- The NSAC announced its first Annual Call for topics in December 2021 and received over 50 applications for either new programmes or changes to existing programmes. These included applications for the introduction of prostate and targeted lung cancer screening.

3. Status of BowelScreen, BreastCheck and CervicalCheck Vs Council Recommendations

- See Table 1 below

¹ [Annex to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation \(CR\) on Strengthening prevention through early detection: A new approach on cancer screening replacing CR 2003/878/EC \(europa.eu\)](#).

Table 1

| EU Council Recommendation | Current Irish Position |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Breast Cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Breast cancer screening for women starting aged 45 to 74 with digital mammography or digital breast tomosynthesis [3D mammogram], and for women with particularly dense breasts consider magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), where medically appropriate. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BreastCheck currently invites women aged 50-69 using digital mammography as the screening test 2. NSS made a submission to NSAC (Dec 2021) for the extension of the programme to 45-74 3. An application (another source) was also made to NSAC to consider breast density recording as part of the programme 4. NSAC requested the HIQA HTA team to undertake a scoping (rapid) review of the evidence to determine whether it warrants a full HTA – decision awaited from NSAC 5. BreastCheck invites 93% of the first time eligible population and 71% of previously screened (provisional data 2020) within its 24-27 month screening round interval² |
| <p>2. Cervical Cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Testing for human papilloma virus (HPV) for women aged 30 to 65 with an interval of 5 years or more, and consider adapting ages and intervals to individual risk based on the HPV vaccination history of the individuals | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CervicalCheck utilises HPV testing as the primary screening test since March 2020 inviting women aged 25-65 2. The school HPV vaccination programme began in May 2010 and (for the vast majority) have not yet reached the screening age of 25 3. NSS and the National Immunisation Office (NIO) plans to link vaccination status with the cervical screening register. 4. CervicalCheck invites >90% of the eligible population within its 3-5 year screening round intervals |
| <p>3. Colorectal Cancer</p> <p>Faecal immunochemical testing (FIT), quantitative with thresholds defined per sex and age and earlier test result is considered the preferred screening test for referring individuals to follow-up colonoscopy between 50 and 74 years old. Endoscopy may be adopted as a primary tool to implement combined strategies.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BowelScreen utilises the quantitative FIT test as the primary screening test 2. BowelScreen invites men and women aged 60-69 with a commitment to extend to 55-74 as per the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 subject to adequate endoscopy resources 3. NSS made a submission to NSAC (Dec 2021) for the extension of the programme to 50-74 4. NSAC requested HIQA HTA team to undertake a scoping (rapid) review of the evidence to determine whether it warrants a full HTA. Full HTA will incorporate examination of targeted thresholds - decision awaited from NSAC 5. BowelScreen invites >90% of the eligible population within its 2 year screening round ² |

² Currently BreastCheck and BowelScreen are approximately 1 year behind on their 2 year screening round interval arising from COVID-19