



# BreastCheck

Market research 2021

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# Breast screening

- Breast screening involves having a mammogram of your breasts. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast used to find breast cancer when it is too small to see or feel.
- BreastCheck invites women aged 50-69 for screening every 2 years\*. The programme is delivered nationally by four static sites (two in Dublin, one in Cork and Galway) and 21 mobile units.
- BreastCheck will detect approximately 1,200 women with breast cancer per year.
- Screening increases the survival rates for breast cancer, because it means cancer is detected and treated earlier.
- Population-based breast cancer screening aims to reduce deaths from breast cancer by 20%.



# Research results





## Research aim & objectives

**Research aim:** Identify and explore peoples' perceptions of screening services in Ireland and what drives and inhibits them to attend screening.

- Gain insights into awareness, knowledge and understanding of screening in Ireland.
- Understand public sentiment and trust of screening services.
- Explore what drives and inhibits attendance at screening appointments.
- Identify knowledge gaps about screening services, limitations of screening and interval cancers.
- Measure awareness and impact of communications campaigns and explore preferred communications channels for engaging with target audiences.



# Research approach



## HCW Interviews

8 interviews were conducted with healthcare workers to understand their experience on the ground

July-August



## Online Survey

2,000 nationally representative interviews were completed to effectively measure and quantify findings

Sept-Oct



## Focus Groups

11 focus groups were carried out to delve deeper into findings and to understand the 'why' behind the results

December



# BreastCheck research overview

- Core Research carried out the research on behalf of the HSE's National Screening Service.
- National survey was among 348 eligible for breast screening.
- 2 focus groups, broken down by age group (50-59, 60-69) and socioeconomic background, mix of urban and rural.
- Where there was a difference in knowledge, results are provided for different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Some results are from research conducted by Kantar in 2021, as part of a project co-funded by NSS and the Irish Cancer Society. The BreastCheck survey results presented in blue were among 292 women aged 50-69.



# High levels of awareness

- 98% are aware of 'BreastCheck'.
- 95% know it's extremely/ very important to attend regular screening.
- 91% are very/ quite likely to attend their next breast screening appointment.
- 92% feel positive towards BreastCheck.
- 94% know that all women aged between 50 and 69 are eligible for BreastCheck.
- 87% agree that BreastCheck provides high quality and safe health care.
- GPs are most cited information source (82%).

A blue speech bubble with a white border and a tail pointing towards the left, containing the text "All of my experiences have been great." in white, sans-serif font.

All of my experiences have been great.



## Low levels of knowledge

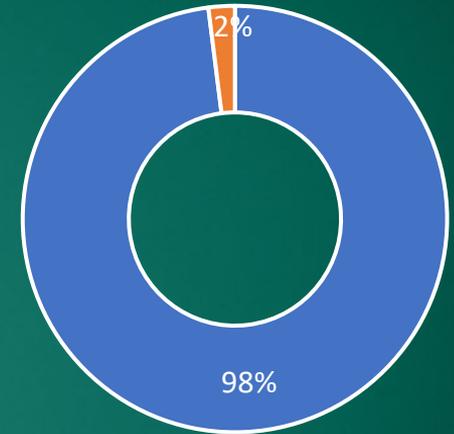
- 21% know very little/ nothing about breast cancer.
- 41% are not confident in spotting symptoms of breast cancer.
- 16% know very little/ nothing about breast screening.
- 22% don't know why it's important for women to attend breast screening.
- 17% disagreed that breast screening is for healthy women.
- 17% don't think they need to worry about developing breast cancer if they go for regular screenings.
- 51% don't know alcohol is a cause of 1 in 8 breast cancers in Ireland.
- 50% think breast screening can prevent breast cancer.



# Sentiment towards BreastCheck

- 98% are aware of 'BreastCheck'.
- 92% feel positive towards BreastCheck; over half feel 'very positive'.
- 34% feel positive because it's a good service.
- Those who don't feel positive mentioned inaccurate results as a reason.
- HCWs' body language and tone play a big role in terms of patients' confidence.
- HCWs feel that the sentiment doesn't always reflect the important role the service may play in preventing illness and deaths.

Awareness of BreastCheck



■ Yes ■ No



## Trust in BreastCheck

77%

Puts the interests  
of people first

34%

Admits  
responsibility when  
things go wrong

87%

Provides high  
quality and safe  
health care

84%

Communicates in a  
way that's easy &  
straightforward for  
me to understand



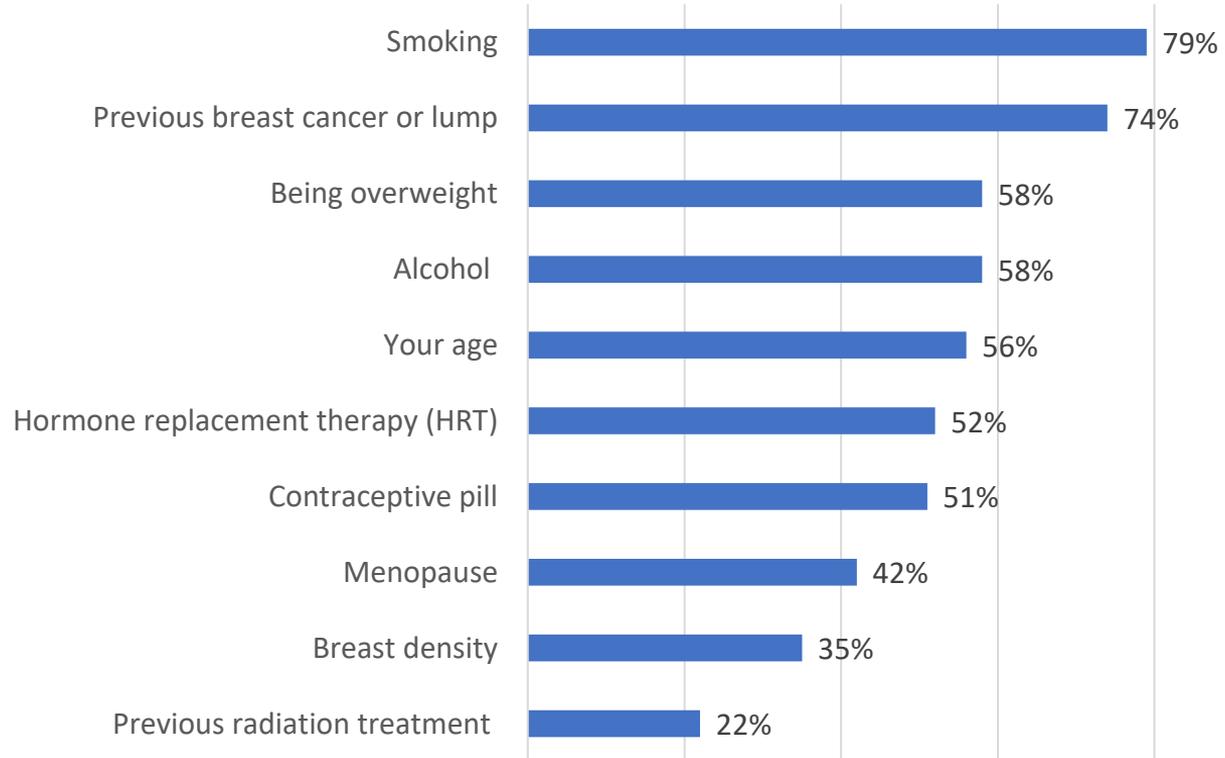
# Breast cancer

- **Breast cancer is the second most common cancer diagnosed among Irish women, with 1 in every 8 likely to get breast cancer in her lifetime.**
- Only 37% have a good level of knowledge of breast cancer; the rate differs significantly based on socioeconomic background:
  - ABC1: 47%
  - C2DE: 32%
- 57% think that women of any age are most at risk of developing breast cancer; only 23% correctly identified the age group.



# Risk of developing breast cancer

- C2DE females (versus ABC1) perceive less risk across a number of factors including age, overweight, breast density and previous radiation therapy.
- When asked what factors can reduce the likelihood of developing breast cancer:
  - Maintain a healthy diet: 67%
  - Stop smoking: 66%
  - Maintain a healthy weight: 54%
  - Reduce alcohol consumption: 57%
  - Take more exercise: 45%





# Breast cancer – symptoms

- **Screening is for people who seem to be healthy; they do not have any symptoms of breast cancer.**
- 84% look out for symptoms of breast cancer.
- 58% are confident in spotting symptoms of breast cancer.
  - ABC1: 35% are not confident
  - C2DE: 46% are not confident
- Those that don't look for symptoms are unsure of what to look out for, are worried of finding something or don't feel confident in medical matters.
- 76% know that breast screening is for healthy women – 17% disagree. HCWs highlighted the need to clarify that screening is for a healthy population.



# Breast cancer – symptoms

- There are high levels of awareness of some symptoms of breast cancer: lump in breast (99%), lump or swelling in armpit (95%), discharge from nipple (93%), change in shape or size of breast (89%), change in appearance of nipple (86%).
- However, there is low awareness and uncertainty around some symptoms:
  - Dimpling on the skin of your breasts (80% are aware)
  - Unexplained persistent back pain (28% are aware; 54% unsure)
  - An ache down either arm starting at the armpit (55% are aware; 35% unsure)
  - A rash on or around your nipple (53% are aware; 32% unsure)



# Interval cancer

- 73% of general population are aware that cancer can occur between screening appointments (called an interval cancer).
- 88% are aware that it's possible to develop breast cancer between breast screenings.
- However, people are not aware of the term 'interval cancer' and would like more information.
- When asked why cancer may develop after a negative mammogram:
  - 80% said because cancer can develop between screenings.
  - 55% said cancer may develop as it was not picked up on the mammogram.
  - 47% said due to a false negative.

You'd be aware of it but it's not something you think about. I'd go and get screening and forget about it.

A blue speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the left, containing the text above.



# Breast screening

- 49% have a good understanding of breast screening. However, this varies by socioeconomic background:
  - ABC1: 63%
  - C2DE: 41%
- 97% know that breast screening involves having a mammogram (x-ray) of a woman's breasts.
- 22% don't know why it's important to attend breast screening.
- Some confusion over BreastCheck screening and referral to symptomatic service.

## Importance of attending breast screening



36%

Early  
detection



34%

Preventative  
Measure

# HE Why attend screening

- High levels of awareness of the importance and benefits of regular screening.
- Motivations for attending breast screening include:
  - peace of mind (59%)
  - receiving an invitation to attend (54%)
  - part of normal healthcare routine (51%)
  - afraid of developing breast cancer in the future (39%)
- Calling out the benefits specifically,
  - early detection (45%)
  - detect changes/ abnormalities (19%)
  - detect cancer (16%)

**95%**

**Know it's extremely/ very important to attend regular screening**

**89%**

**Know breast screening is a way of detecting breast cancer that's too small to see or feel**

**91%**

**Plan to attend their next breast screening appointment**



## Misconceptions and knowledge gaps

51%

Don't know alcohol is responsible for one in eight breast cancers in Ireland.

31%

Are not aware the menopause and being overweight may make you more at risk of developing breast cancer.

17%

Think they don't need to worry about developing breast cancer if they go for regular screenings.

50%

Think breast screening can prevent breast cancer.



# Limitations of screening

- 66% don't know what the limitations of screening are.
  - 45% mentioned misdiagnosis
  - 20% that something might be missed
  - only 4% said that cancer can develop between screenings.
- However, 88% agreed with the statement “It is possible to develop breast cancer between breast screenings”. This indicates possible lack of understanding of the word ‘limitations’, as confirmed by the focus groups.
- 65% agreed with the statement that “Screening can lead to treatment for issues that turn out to be harmless”.



## Barriers to attending screening

- 4% of those who have been invited don't attend at all. Reasons given were: fear/ anxiety of finding something wrong, too busy, missed appointment, no symptoms.
- Not understanding the importance of attending screening was mentioned as being a barrier (but 95% know it's extremely/ very important to attend regular screening).
- HCWs report poor attendance by lower socioeconomic and some minority groups for screening generally.

**46%**

**Fear of finding something wrong**

**45%**

**Uncomfortable process**

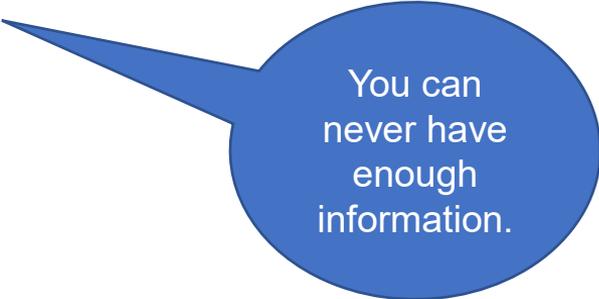
**39%**

**Delayed appointment due to COVID-19**



## What to communicate

- Call out success rates and the positive stories – people who found something and were OK.
- Explain statistics as to how many screened/ cancers caught.
- Talk about reality of process and real life experiences. Further information is required on the below topics:
  - why breast screening is just for women 50-69 (48%)
  - how to reduce their risk of breast cancer (47%)
  - the symptoms of breast cancer (40%)
  - risk factors for developing breast cancer (38%)
  - limitations of screening (32%)
- Address barriers to attending screening.



You can never have enough information.



## How to communicate – language

- Need to be mindful of language, e.g. ‘limitations’, ‘detect’.
- People are not aware of the term ‘interval cancer’.
- Research showed that:
  - 82% think the purpose of breast screening is to diagnose breast cancer.
  - 16% said a benefit of breast screening is to detect cancer.
- This reflects lack of clarity as to what breast screening does and perhaps confusion with diagnosis of cancer/ detecting abnormalities, which may lead to cancer.
- There is a lack of understanding of the word ‘limitations’.



# How to communicate – communications channels

- 69% would prefer to receive the invitation by letter but emails also have a role to play.
- Registration process is simple and easy with all receiving an invitation in the post and attending as a result. The leaflet received with the invitation is helpful and informative.
- HCWs/ GPs could play a more active role in providing info and should be reminded to ask patients when about their last screening date or whether they are due one.
- Ask people to share their stories/ experiences. The profile of the service has increased over the years due to public figures acting as advocates.
  - People who had a good experience as “that’s the experience most of us have” – they can talk positively, even about pain of process.
  - Those who had abnormalities found from screening and their journey.
  - People from different communities.



# Performance of communications campaigns

- Radio ad and VOD ran in October 2020, when BreastCheck resumed screening. VOD continued at different bursts throughout the year.
- 32% have heard the radio ad.
  - 90% felt confident COVID-19 measures were in place.
  - 86% said it would encourage them to attend their BreastCheck appointment.
- 29% recall seeing the VOD.
  - 92% felt confident COVID-19 measures were in place.
  - 87% said it would encourage them to attend their BreastCheck appointment.

