

## Operational Plan 2021

We have completed **11 objectives** on our operational plan so far this year. The plan has detail of the work taking place across the four programmes and nine departments of the NSS, and it can be reviewed [here](#). One of the completed projects – **the LGBT+ Cervical Screening Study** – was completed in September and is detailed below.

## Implementing the Interval Cancer Reports' Recommendations

The reports recommended that our cancer screening programmes provide **interval cancer reviews** in a quality assured way and in line with **international best practice**. They said we should **work to increase public trust and confidence, and understanding of screening**.

It is a year since the HSE published the three Interval Cancer Reports, and established five working groups to implement their recommendations. You can read the reports [here](#).

- Our **CervicalCheck group** is working with patient groups as it develops its patient-requested review process. It is creating **patient information and supports** while looking at the resources needed to do reviews.
- Our **BreastCheck group** is completing its **interval cancer review framework**, and also looking at resources needed for the review process, as well as communication materials for patients and for medical staff.
- Our **BowelScreen group** has developed a draft template for **recording post-colonoscopy colorectal cancer**. It is developing patient information to support informed choice and consent.
- Our **Legal Framework group** is commissioning three pieces of research in the areas of **law, health ethics and health economics**, to inform its recommendations on the conduct of, and participation in, screening.
- Our **Communications group** has completed the first part of its **research project**. The second part, which is a large-scale online questionnaire of 2,000 screening participants, is under way.

# CervicalCheck

## Where are we now?

- **We have caught up with our invites and reminder letters, and everyone now due a screening test is being invited.** We ran a large-scale information campaign in Q1 2021 and our number of completed screening tests is running at almost **20% above target**. Over **250,000** people had been screened by the end August 2021, from a yearly target of 280,000 people.
- **The National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL) development is on track to be operational by end of 2022.** Building of the labs and recruitment is under way.
- **Our quality improvement process for 2021/22 continues** across the areas of public and professional information provision; healthcare professional education and training; quality at every point of the screening pathway; and ICT development.
- **QI Portfolio:** 33 quality improvement projects across five workstreams outlining strategic planning and implementation of projects for the next three years.
- **We launched our LGBT+ Cervical Screening Study in September** with a commitment to implement its recommendations. You can read about the study [here](#). Cervical screening advocate Ruth O'Mahony told her story in support of the study [here](#).
- Colposcopy clinics and some histology labs are operating with reduced capacity due to ongoing issues with the cyber-attack on the HSE.
- Our Laboratory Services Stakeholder Update webinar was attended by over 200 GPs, practice nurses and other healthcare professionals. The webinar raised awareness of the laboratory quality assurance, standards and performance indicators underpinning the CervicalCheck programme.

## Next steps

- We will be **reaching out** to people who do not respond to their screening invite; we are implementing our LGBT+ research; and we are also looking at ways to connect with over-50s who are eligible for screening.
- We are looking toward a strategy for cervical cancer eradication.
- We are encouraging responsible reporting on cervical screening with a **new reporters' guide**, and publishing our revised sample-taker education and training programme.
- We are evaluating our text messaging study as part of our commitment to increase equity in screening. The study recommended the use of simple text reminders to prompt the behaviour of people when they are booking an appointment. The study found no significant impact from the use of behaviour change prompts. The study recommended further audit of the cervical screening register to understand accuracy and the reach of text reminders.

# BreastCheck

## Where are we now?

- Our **staff vaccination programme** is complete and we are close to achieving a pre-COVID daily screening rate. We are optimising appointment uptake with a new text messaging system and communication to women to let us know if they can't attend.
- We have lost nearly a year of screening time. **Those due to be screened in 2020 will be screened in 2021, and those due in 2021 will be invited in 2022.** We aim to return to two-yearly screening as soon as possible.
- We have **three new mobile units** coming on-stream. The first is already screening in Roscommon, with two further mobile units due to be operating in early 2022. We redeployed a Dublin unit to Donegal for seven weeks to increase screening rate in that county, in September and October this year.
- Our **communication campaign is under way for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.** It lets women know when they will be screened and what they can do if they are waiting.

## We are interested in

- International research into the **impact of the pandemic on diagnosis and treatment.**
- **Efficacy of screening and screening tools** other age ranges.
- **Ongoing research** to determine if breast density information can be used along with other breast cancer risk factor information to improve identification of women most at risk of breast cancer.

## Next steps

- **Returning to two-yearly screening,** dependent on continued easing of restrictions.
- **Radiology and radiography recruitment,** and staffing our new mobiles.

# BowelScreen

## COVID-19 in 2021

- The HSE **cyber-attack** and **COVID-19** reduced capacity to schedule follow-up tests from endoscopy, histology clinics and surgery. Our BowelScreen staff provided units with support in management of BowelScreen participants during this time.
- Our new screening unit is operating in **University Hospital Waterford**, and all 14 endoscopy units are inviting BowelScreen participants. We are issuing invites relative to endoscopy capacity.
- A review by HSE Programmes and Campaigns unit of our campaign during Bowel Cancer Awareness Month shows **an increase in awareness and registration** for BowelScreen.
- **Eleven** easy-to-read BowelScreen documents have been produced and uploaded to our website by our Public Health department to aid people who may have difficulty using our materials.

## We are interested in

- The use of **colon capsule technology** for BowelScreen participants. A person swallows the capsule, which contains a small disposable camera. It is the size of a vitamin pill and takes thousands of pictures as it travels through the person's colon.

## Next steps

- Implementation planning for one-year increase in age-range in 2023 (from 59-69 years).
- Focus on increasing uptake and capacity.

# Diabetic RetinaScreen

## COVID-19 in 2021

**We have invited everyone who was due to be screened during the pause in 2020.** Our focus is on inviting those who are now due screening, and all our screening locations are open. The cyber-attack has affected treatment clinics. We are continuing to review our treatment pathways so that those most in need of treatment can be seen first.

## Where are we now?

- We are looking at ways to **increase capacity** for treating screening patients referred with diabetic eye disease and non-diabetic eye disease.
- We are continuing the **roll-out of our new two-yearly screening pathway**, inviting eligible people when they are due.
- Our communications campaign is asking people of all ages to **attend their screening appointment**, and explaining the benefits and limitations of screening.

## We are interested in

- **Evaluating our community treatment clinic pilot project** and implementing an extended digital surveillance screening pilot and model of care.

## Next steps

- **We are ensuring all routine first review patients in excess of one year have been invited**, and piloting new community treatment clinics which will enable some participants to be seen in the community rather than in a hospital setting.

## Quality, Safety and Risk (QSR) department

**The QSR department ensures effective delivery of our quality, safety and risk management agenda.**

We are in the final stage of our project to integrate our quality management systems and provide training modules for staff. We continue to monitor the NSS risk register in line with the HSE Risk Management framework. We are providing guidance and support in management and reporting of incidents and leading on information governance. Our project to improve awareness of core areas of HSE internal controls, as appropriate to roles, is under way. This should help with garnering improved responses on the Controls Assurance Review Process (CARP) later this year.

## Programme Evaluation Unit (PEU)

During the first half of 2021, PEU published five peer-reviewed articles, and presented 11 papers at seven virtual conferences. PEU's core work is data provision for internal and external stakeholders.

Two of PEU's peer-reviewed articles published 2021 are: **Correlation of Faecal Immunochemical Testing Levels with Pathology Results in a National Colorectal Cancer Screening Program**; and **Factors associated with non-attendance in the Irish national diabetic retinopathy screening programme**.

The conferences included the British Society for Colposcopy & Cervical Pathology Conference in April, and the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists International Conference in June.

PEU's Dr Thérèse Mooney said the research would not be possible without the countless screening participants who engage with focus groups and surveys to give an insight into attitudes and behaviours around screening.

## Quality Assurance Framework

A **Quality Assurance Framework** has been developed and approved. It aims to strengthen ongoing quality improvement and improve outcomes for the people we care for in screening.

### Next steps

- Embedding the framework with our screening programmes
- Identifying NSS-wide opportunities to improve consistency and quality
- Publishing the framework + guidelines

## Patient and Public Partnership (PPP)

A **'jargon buster'** document is being jointly developed by patients and staff in the PPP Implementation Group. It will work like a dictionary, aiming to give plain English explanations of words, phrases and acronyms that are used in the Screening Service.

The **PPP Implementation Group** was formed to co-develop implementation of the PPP strategy, and is an important step in creating a level playing field between staff and patients.

The jargon buster is one step in the wider PPP strategy implementation which aims for a more **person-centred service in the organisation**. The NSS set out its strategic direction for patient and public partnership in the organisation with the publication of its strategy document two years ago.

## Communications

We are developing a **new NSS corporate website** to provide news and updates on screening to the public, media, elected representatives, healthcare professionals and researchers at home and abroad. We have just completed research with users to help plan the concept and content of our website.

We have **completed a project defining our core messages on screening**, its benefits and limitations, and are user-testing our results.

We are **piloting the NSS 'information hub'** – a new information service combining the expertise of our Public Health and Communications departments, with the input of our programmes and other business units. The hub will support the development of screening information for patients, the public and healthcare professionals.

**We have evaluated the increase in awareness of screening driven by our national campaigns for CervicalCheck in Q1 and BowelScreen in Q2 this year.** Both campaigns had high engagement, and saw an increase in people checking the register and HSE.ie for more information. Our current campaign for BreastCheck focuses on informing women about their next screening appointment, and the benefits of prevention and early detection. Our current campaign for Diabetic RetinaScreen highlights our research that diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in adults of working age.

### We are interested in

- **A social listening exercise that takes the temperature of how our screening programmes are talked about on social media.** It will help us understand how people feel about screening, and help us provide a trusted source of information for them.