

For health professionals in Northern Ireland

February 2025



Supported by



Supporting informed participation in Northern Ireland's cancer screening programmes

Screening can help beat cancer.



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Together we are
beating cancer

Cancer Research UK is running a public-facing cancer screening campaign in Northern Ireland from 17 February 2025 for six weeks. The campaign aims to increase awareness of cancer screening and support informed participation amongst eligible adults.

Why is this campaign needed?

Screening is an effective tool for detecting cancers at an earlier stage, or even preventing them. In Northern Ireland, more than 60% of cancers diagnosed through

a screening route were caught at stage 1, when there are more treatment options available and better outcomes for patients are more likely¹.

However, to harness the full potential of cancer screening the public need to be aware of the screening programmes and who's eligible, so they can make an informed choice about taking part.

Our **2023 Cancer Awareness Measure survey** collected nationally representative data about the UK public's attitudes towards screening. It showed that (compared to those who did take part in screening) those who didn't participate were more likely to report being put off because they felt they weren't at risk of developing cancer, or they hadn't experienced any symptoms. The survey also identified other key barriers to participation, such as feelings of embarrassment and concerns around pain or messiness².

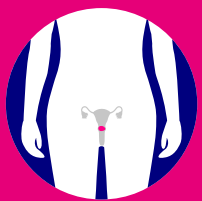
Our campaign seeks to increase informed participation by addressing these misconceptions and other barriers to taking part.

GPs play a vital role in helping eligible people access cancer screening and providing them with information to understand the benefits and risks. So as part of the campaign, we're providing resources and guidance that help GPs to support access and informed choice.

Who is the campaign targeting?

The campaign will target all adults aged 18+ across Northern Ireland. The aim is to help shift awareness among all audiences already eligible for screening as well as those approaching eligibility.

The following people are eligible for each screening programme:



Cervical: women, transgender men and non-binary people* with a cervix aged 25 to 64.



Breast: women, including some transgender women, some transgender men and some non-binary people* aged 50 to 70.



Bowel: people aged 60 to 74.

*For more information on the eligibility of transgender and non-binary people for cancer screening visit cruk.org/tnbscreening or [PHA's Screening for transgender service user booklet](#).

The campaign will also target key groups who are less likely to participate in cancer screening:

- **First-time invitees:** those who are being invited for screening for the first time.
- **Non-responders:** those who've previously not responded to screening invitations.

How will the campaign be promoted?

The campaign runs from 17 February 2025 to 30 March on TV, radio, out of home billboards, social media (Facebook and Instagram), digital adverts, regional media and in cinemas.



Will the campaign potentially impact service capacity?

Practices may see a slight increase in the number of questions about screening or symptomatic presentations and there could be an impact felt in secondary care services too. Whilst we can't predict the scale of the impact, the effects of our previous campaigns suggest it's likely to be minimal. The campaign has been carefully planned in partnership with the Public Health Agency and the Cancer Programme in Northern Ireland. It aims to complement the screening invitations sent to eligible people, by encouraging them to make an informed choice about participating.



How can you and your practice help address inequalities in cancer screening?

In the UK there's evidence that participation in all three screening programmes is lower in some groups. These groups include: people with a lower socioeconomic status, men (for bowel), younger eligible people, people from ethnic minority communities and people with a mental or physical disability.

Understanding the barriers to participation for these groups is important when looking at ways to support access.

Barriers may include:

- not being able to understand or access information on screening.
- finding it embarrassing or shameful to take part in screening.
- being fearful of what the screening test might find.
- concerns around the practicalities and cleanliness of the test.
- difficulties attending a screening appointment due to other commitments eg work, childcare.

Read our guide to reducing inequalities in cancer screening at [**cruk.org/screening-inequalities**](https://cruk.org/screening-inequalities). The guide also provides practical tips and resources to help identify and address inequalities in your local population.

Our cervical and bowel screening good practice guides listed in the key resources section provide more information and guidance on addressing barriers specific to these programmes.



What can you and your practice do in advance to support the campaign?

Be prepared for a slight increase in patients who've seen the campaign, have questions or concerns about cancer screening, or possible signs and symptoms of cancer.

- Tell your practice team about the campaign – including receptionists, practice nurses and those involved in managing patients with long-term conditions – as they're a key touchpoint for patients.
- Join our webinar for GPs to refresh your knowledge around cancer screening, – see details under 'Key resources'.
- Be aware of key groups who are more likely to face inequalities or barriers to screening, such as younger eligible adults.
- Look at your practice or regional data to see where inequalities in uptake lie. Use our guide at [**cruk.org/screening-inequalities**](https://cruk.org/screening-inequalities)
- Visit the cancer screening webpages [**cruk.org/hp-screening**](https://cruk.org/hp-screening) and [**cancer.screening.hscni.net**](https://cancer.screening.hscni.net) to learn more about screening programmes and how you can support informed screening participation.



Key resources to support you and your practice



Health professional webinar

Join our cancer screening in Northern Ireland webinar on 20 February 2025, 1–2 pm.

Register at gpmi.co.uk for a co-hosted webinar with GPMI. The webinar will include an overview of the campaign and the cancer screening programmes in Northern Ireland, plus the role of primary care in addressing inequalities in uptake.



Webpages and online guides

- cruk.org/hp-screening – cancer screening webpages for healthcare professionals
- cruk.org/screeningNI – information about the public facing campaign
- cruk.org/bowel-good-practice – bowel cancer screening good practice guide
- cruk.org/cervical-good-practice – cervical cancer screening good practice guide

Newsletter



Sign up for our Cancer Update for GPs e-newsletter for best practice guidance, practical tools and expert resources.



Follow us (@CRUKHCPs)



"As GPs we can play a vital role to help increase awareness of cancer screening by supporting people to make informed decisions about participating. Screening is an effective tool for detecting cancers at an earlier stage and can help save lives."

Dr Jonathan Dillon, Northern Ireland

References

- [1] Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, Routes to diagnosis in Northern Ireland, 2020. Accessed via: [Routes to Cancer Diagnosis in Northern Ireland – New Research – Business Services Organisation \(BSO\)](#) website.
- [2] Whitelock, V. (2023), [Cancer Research UK's September 2023 Cancer Awareness Measure 'Plus; \(CAM+\)](#).



If you have any comments about this document, please get in touch via SEInbox@cancer.org.uk