

Cancer Screening awareness campaign

Northern Ireland
February–March 2025

Campaign overview

Supported by the Public Health Agency, Cancer Research UK is launching a nationwide campaign in Northern Ireland which aims to increase:

- ✓ public awareness of cancer screening
- ✓ informed participation among those eligible by addressing key barriers such as fear and confusion around the purpose of screening

Why are we focusing on screening in Northern Ireland?

Screening is an important way to help prevent cancer and find it at an early stage when treatment is more likely to be successful.

In Northern Ireland, more than 60% of cancers diagnosed through a screening route were caught at stage 1, which suggests a positive route to finding cancers at an earlier stage[1].

Screening can help beat cancer.



Five-year bowel cancer survival estimates by stage in Northern Ireland



Diagnosed at earliest
stage (stage 1)



More than 9 in 10

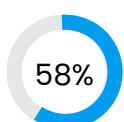
Diagnosed at latest
stage (stage 4)



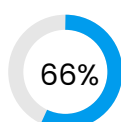
Less 1 in 10

Data is age-standardised net survival for adults (aged 15 to 99 years) in Northern Ireland in 2012–2016 followed up to 2021, for patients with bowel cancer. Source: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry 2024.

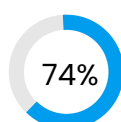
Yet we know screening uptake could be improved in Northern Ireland. Uptake rates based on 2022/23 data are as follows [2]:



Bowel



Cervical



Breast

One of the ways we can improve uptake is by addressing key barriers to participation such as a lack of awareness that screening is for people without symptoms, feelings of embarrassment and concerns around pain or messiness [3]. Our campaign seeks to increase informed participation in screening by addressing these misconceptions and common barriers.

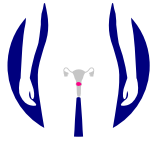
What are we doing and when?

Our multi-channel campaign will run from 17 February to 30 March 2025. Advertising will feature on TV, radio, cinema, outdoor posters, digital display, social media and owned channels.

As part of our Cancer Awareness Roadshow, our nurses will engage with the public to increase awareness of Northern Ireland's bowel, cervical and breast screening programmes, signpost people to appropriate support and promote the importance of early diagnosis in people without symptoms.

Who is the campaign aimed at?

The campaign will target all adults aged 18+ across Northern Ireland. The aim is to raise awareness among everyone already eligible for screening, as well as those approaching eligibility in the next few years. 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

What are the key messages of the campaign?

- Screening can help beat cancer. When you're invited, don't ignore it.
- Northern Ireland's bowel, cervical and breast cancer screening programmes are there to spot possible signs of cancer before they're noticeable.
- Screening is for non-symptomatic people.
- Screening can save lives.
- Screening has both possible benefits and risks. You should read the information in your screening invitation to help you decide whether to take part.

How will we support health professionals?

Ahead of the campaign launch, we're sending tailored campaign briefing guides to GPs, GP practice staff and community pharmacies across Northern Ireland. The briefings include guidance and resources that help health professionals support people with accessing screening and making an informed choice about taking part. We'll also be promoting the resources to these audiences via digital display ads (on GP Notebook), e-newsletters and social media.

On 20 February 2025, we'll be hosting a GPNI bowel cancer screening webinar for GPs across Northern Ireland, supported by the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care. This will provide an overview of the campaign and the cancer screening programmes in Northern Ireland, plus the role of primary care in addressing inequalities in uptake.



How will we evaluate the campaign?

The campaign will be measured using a mixed methods approach. This will include pre-and post-surveys and a range of qualitative methodologies, as well as results from channel-specific reports from the final post-campaign analysis.

Where are we directing the public?

In the first instance, we're encouraging people to read the information that comes in their screening invitation letter. For more information, people can visit cruk.org/screeningNI. This webpage provides localised content on screening in Northern Ireland and is designed to help break down barriers to screening and support informed uptake. We'll also be providing information leaflets and posters in Cancer Research UK stores across 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] Cancer Research UK, Cancer Intelligence Team. Uptake of Bowel, Breast and Cervical Screening in the UK (2024). Available from: [Early Cancer Diagnosis Data Hub](#)
- [3] Whitelock, V. (2023), Cancer Research UK's September 2023 Cancer Awareness Measure 'Plus'; (CAM+).



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