

Reducing inequalities in cancer screening

We believe it's crucial to reduce barriers and inequalities in cancer screening participation.

In the UK, although there are data gaps, there's evidence that participation in the breast, bowel and cervical screening programmes is lower in some groups. In this guide, we offer practical tips to help address inequalities and signpost to further resources and information.

Taking part in screening is an individual choice, but it must be a choice that's equally available and accessible to all.



Identifying inequalities in your local population

- **Understand who are your lower participation groups in cancer screening.**

These could include*:

- people with a lower socioeconomic status [1–5]
- men (bowel) [1, 3, 6]
- younger age groups [1]
- people from ethnic minority communities [2, 5, 7–10]
- disabled people (people with learning or physical disabilities) [9, 11, 12]
- people with a sensory impairment [12]
- people with severe mental illness [5, 12]
- people from an LGBTQ+ community (cervical and breast) [13]

- **Understand the barriers to participation** [14–20]. These may include:

- language and communication
- low health literacy and numeracy
- fear and denial around the test outcome
- concerns about the practicalities and cleanliness of the test (bowel)
- cultural and religious beliefs
- embarrassment or shame
- negative past experiences
- misconception that the test is not

applicable if you don't have any cancer symptoms

- perceived low risk of cancer
- the fact that it takes place away from the usual health care settings (bowel)

- **Use your practice's IT system to find people eligible for each of the cancer screening programmes** in particular:

- people who are not likely to engage
- people approaching the age of their first invitation
- people who haven't responded to their invitation
- people who have not participated in screening previously

- **Use a flag or alert to identify people eligible for screening who may need extra support.**

- **Regularly update and review your patient demographic profile information** including disabled people with learning disabilities and people with severe mental illness.

*This list isn't exhaustive and you may be able to identify other people in your local population who are less likely to take part in cancer screening.

Could you have a nominated lead for addressing inequalities?

Key actions you can take



Provide and signpost to accessible information

- Offer access to a trained bilingual advocate in your practice.
- Provide access to screening information in a wide range of accessible formats:

Bowel screening

- Our [bowel screening webpage for health professionals](#) has a variety of patient resources, including:
 - step-by-step pictorial infographics patients can take away
 - patient leaflets and animations in different languages
 - a bowel screening video addressing practical issues and patients' potential concerns about the test
- Signpost to our [bowel screening webpage for patients](#), which includes details of the screening helplines for each nation.
- Download or order our [patient resources](#) for free.

Cervical screening

- Download or order our [cervical cancer leaflet with screening support](#) for patients to take away.
- Signpost to our [cervical screening webpage for patients](#) with information specific to each UK nation.
- Send our [screening video](#) showing what happens at a cervical screening appointment.
- Visit our [cervical screening webpage for health professionals](#) for more information and resources.

Breast screening

- There's breast screening information specific to each UK nation:
 - [Scotland](#)
 - [England](#)
 - [Wales](#)
 - [Northern Ireland](#)
- Share our [breast screening video](#) showing what happens at a breast screening appointment.

Explore opportunities to work with key partners in your area

- Consider liaising with community specialist services* to find people in the eligible age cohort who may benefit from extra support:
 - Work with Community Disability teams – multi-agency health and social care team supports adults with disabilities.
 - Work in partnership with primary care / health boards to provide training, advice and support.
 - Work with Public Health teams on health promotion improvement and awareness.
- Consider if primary care support roles with community outreach can support targeted work.
- Work with voluntary sector organisations within the communities who specialise in supporting specific groups (refugees, mental health charities, learning disability groups, homelessness charities, faith groups and leaders).
- **Co-develop community outreach and engagement with your target communities.**
- **Contact your local screening service to identify opportunities for support.**

*This list is not exhaustive. You may find other teams in your area who could provide support.





Top tips

- **Proactively bring up screening** with eligible patients and provide an opportunity to answer questions.
- **Discuss any additional support required to participate in cancer screening** as part of new patient appointments, routine appointments, flu clinics and health checks.
- **Apply the correct clinical coding to every screening result**, use a flag or alert system to identify non-responders and record how support will be offered.
- **Consider sending a follow-up text or letter** from your practice or **offering drop-in clinics to non-responders** to offer additional support.
- **Commit to trialling different approaches to support a specific low-participation group** to take part in a cancer screening. For examples of how to do this, see our good practice guides ([bowel](#) and [cervical](#)).

Statement of intent:

We're committed to informed choice when it comes to screening participation. Screening has both **benefits and risks**, and these must be appropriately communicated.



Where can I find out more?



For more information, the latest evidence and other supporting resources, visit cruk.org/health-professional/screening.

Access **government guidance and resources** for providers and commissioners.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, contact SEinbox@cancer.org.uk

References

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