



**Health  
Information  
and Quality  
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis  
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

## **Terms of Reference**

A review of the governance arrangements for the provision of population-based health screening services by the Health Service Executive at national level

22 April 2026

## **Terms of Reference for a review of the governance arrangements for the provision of population-based health screening services by the Health Service Executive at national level**

The review will be conducted under Section 8(1)(c) of the Health Act 2007 as amended,<sup>1</sup> monitoring compliance with the *National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare* (referred to as the national standards).<sup>2</sup>

### **Background**

The National Screening Service was established in January 2007 by the then Minister for Health and Children in response to the 2006 *National Cancer Strategy*, which advocated for a comprehensive cancer control programme. The National Screening Service is part of the Health Service Executive (HSE). The service delivers four national population-based cancer and non-cancer screening services aimed at reducing morbidity and mortality in the population through prevention and or early recognition of disease and treatment to improve health outcomes. The four population-based health screening services delivered by the National Screening Service are:

- BreastCheck - National Breast Screening Programme
- CervicalCheck - National Cervical Screening Programme
- BowelScreen - National Bowel Screening Programme
- Diabetic RetinaScreen - National Diabetic RetinaScreen Programme.

Furthermore, the National Healthy Childhood Programme delivers two national population-based health screening services for newborn babies as part of the HSE's national public health function. The two population-based national newborn screening services are:

- National Bloodspot Screening Programme
- National Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Programme.

### **Context for this review**

Ireland's population-based health screening services are vital for the early detection and treatment of cancer, diabetic retinopathy and inherited conditions and hearing difficulties in newborn babies. Early detection and initiation of treatment of disease leads to better treatment outcomes, prevents complications and improves public health. Screening for disease supports a shift from reactive treatment to proactive health management and disease prevention, empowering people to make informed choices about their health, while also reducing overall disease burden on people and healthcare systems.<sup>3</sup>

Following concerns raised around the delivery of services in the CervicalCheck screening programme in 2018, a number of reviews of the service were carried out.<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9</sup> These reviews identified gaps in the programme's governance and accountability arrangements, as well as in practices in relation to open disclosure. The HSE committed to implementing the recommendations from the reviews, and many important changes have since been implemented, including the introduction of primary human papillomavirus (HPV) testing as the primary screening method in CervicalCheck, the introduction of mandatory open disclosure through the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 and a strategic focus on eliminating cervical cancer by 2040.<sup>10,11</sup>

HIQA recognises that the population-based health screening services are pursuing measures to improve their services where necessary, increase participation and to address inequities in access and uptake across screening programmes. The purpose of this review is to provide an independent assurance to the public that required improvements to the way some screening services were provided have been made and are sustained across all programmes currently in operation. Such a review is of importance, not only because of the vital role screening plays in early detection of potential disease in what is a growing and ageing population in Ireland, but also because there is a potential for screening services to grow into the future. The review aims to ensure that any such growth in Ireland's health screening services is built upon strong foundations, and service development is supported by continuous improvement.

### **Specific objectives for this review**

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) aims to protect people who use healthcare services and to drive improvements in the quality and safety of services provided to them. In line with its functions under section 8(1)(c) of the Health Act 2007 as amended, HIQA will conduct a review of the governance arrangements for the provision of population-based health screening services by the Health Service Executive (HSE) at national level.

Through this review, HIQA will assess compliance with a number of national standards as relevant to the terms of reference so that the public can be assured the screening services:

- are underpinned by robust governance arrangements that ensures the delivery of high-quality, safe and sustainable services
- are effective in assuring and ensuring the quality and safety, and continued improvement of the services
- have implemented the learning from the reviews and reports into CervicalCheck across the screening services, as relevant

- consider the identified needs and preferences of people who use the screening services
- have arrangements in place to ensure that when things go wrong with the screening services, that the provision of care is person centred in the context of openness, patient communication and open disclosure.

Should HIQA identify any areas for improvement or non-compliance with the national standards in screening services, it will make recommendations for the HSE to support the services to come into full compliance with the national standards.

Screening services should put the identified needs and preferences of people who use the services at the centre of all their activities. HIQA's review team will review how feedback from people using the screening services is taken into account and used to continually support and, where necessary, to improve the planning, delivery and coordination of high-quality, safe screening services.

### **Scope of the review**

This review aims to assess the governance and oversight arrangements in the population-based health screening services provided by the HSE at national level. This includes screening services defined by the HSE as population-based health screening services, which aim to assess the risk of disease, and recognising disease before symptoms appear. The review will assess the corporate and clinical governance and oversight arrangements in place governing and supporting the delivery of the four population-based health screening programmes delivered by the National Screening Service and the two population-based newborn screening services delivered by the National Healthy Childhood Programme across the Republic of Ireland.

Screening services for gastric cancer, lung cancer and prostate cancer are not currently provided by the HSE in Ireland and are not included within the scope of this review.

### **Governance of the review**

HIQA will carry out this review in line with its functions under section 8(1)(c) of the Health Act 2007 as amended, monitoring compliance with the national standards. In conducting the review, HIQA notes the provisions of section 8(2) of the Health Act 2007, as amended that apply when it is conducting compliance monitoring pursuant to the Section 8(1)(c) of the Act.

A review team, appointed in accordance with the Health Act 2007 as amended, will carry out the review. The team may exercise all of the statutory powers available to HIQA pursuant to the Health Act 2007 as amended. HIQA has internal governance

and oversight arrangements in place to support the implementation of a robust assessment approach for this review.

In the conduct of the review, HIQA will, where necessary, seek advice and expertise external to HIQA to fully inform the conduct and findings of the review. This may involve the provision of technical advice and support of a subject matter nature. Notwithstanding the input of external expertise to inform the review, the conduct and methodology of this review and its outputs remain the full responsibility of HIQA.

### **Terms of Reference**

The following terms of reference have been determined for the conduct of this review.

1. To assess the governance, leadership and management arrangements in place for the provision of high-quality, safe population-based health screening services by the HSE at national level.
2. To assess the screening services' compliance with the national standards, cognisant of the learnings from the reviews and reports into CervicalCheck.
3. In assessing the *capacity and capability* of the population-based health screening services, HIQA will:
  - review the effectiveness and sustainability of the governance and oversight arrangements in place to support the ongoing delivery of high-quality, safe population-based health screening services. This will include a review of the arrangements in place for:
    - providing assurances regarding the quality and safety of screening services
    - risk management and reporting
    - formalised agreements for the provision and quality of services provided externally on behalf of the HSE
    - ensuring learnings from the reviews and reports into CervicalCheck have been implemented across the screening services, where relevant
    - screening services to use their resources to achieve the best possible quality and safety outcomes for people who use the services.

4. In assessing the **quality and safety** of the population-based health screening services, HIQA will:
  - review the extent to which the governance and oversight arrangements support a person-centred approach to care and the delivery of high-quality, safe and effective services. This will include a review of:
    - how the screening services considers the identified needs and preferences of people who use the services
    - how the screening services protects people using the services from the risk of harm
    - the screening services' compliance with the policies and procedures to support open disclosure
    - how people using the screening services or who have used the services are informed and supported after an adverse event.

While the review will focus on the above, in line with our functions under Section 8 1(c) of the Health Act (2007) as amended, the review team may assess compliance with any of the national standards from the *National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare* as required.

5. To prepare and publish a report of the findings of the review to ensure transparency and promote quality in the delivery and safety of screening services for the benefit of the health and welfare of the public.
6. Where HIQA identifies gaps in the service and or non-compliance with the national standards, it will make recommendations in the review report for the purposes of quality improvement and to support the screening services to come into full compliance with the national standards. HIQA will make recommendations to the HSE that will reflect best practice and the future vision for screening services in line with standards, policy and legislation.
7. If, in the course of the review, it becomes apparent that there are reasonable grounds to believe that there are wider areas of concern or risks to people using the population-based health screening services, HIQA may recommend that these terms be extended to include further evaluation or that a new body of work should be undertaken, as appropriate.

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**For further information, please contact:**

**Health Information and Quality Authority**

**George's Court**

**George's Lane**

**Smithfield**

**Dublin 7**

**D07 E98Y**

**+353 (0)1 8147400**

**info@hiqa.ie**

**www.hiqa.ie**

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