

Chairperson's Note
Virtual meeting of the National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC)
23 February 2023

The National Screening Advisory Committee held its first meeting of 2023 on Thursday, 23 February.

New members

In December 2022 the Committee sought expressions of interest for appointment to four vacant roles in the areas of Communications/Journalism, Cancer, Medico-Legal and Diagnostic Imaging. The selection process is now complete and four new members have been appointed by the Minister for Health.

[Ms Hilary McGouran](#) was appointed to the Communications/Journalism role, [Ms Dolores Keane](#) was appointed to the Medico-Legal role, [Prof Deirdre Murray](#) was appointed to the cancer role and [Dr Alissa Connors](#) was appointed to the Diagnostic Imaging role. We look forward to welcoming the newest members of the Committee to our next meeting on 25 May 2023.

NSAC Annual Call 2022

The second NSAC Annual Call for proposals for new population-based screening programmes or changes to existing programmes ran from November 2022 to January 2023. A total of 19 submissions were received and the Committee was pleased to see increased engagement from members of the public and patient advocates

Many of the proposals received in Annual Call 2022 are already on the Work Programme that followed the Annual Call 2021. We confirmed the decisions previously made on these proposals. We have requested HIQA to examine other proposals under consideration, including Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm, Spinal Muscular Atrophy and breast and bowel cancers.

We received a proposal for the introduction of a screening programme based on ultrasound examination to identify Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip in newborn babies up to six weeks old. We decided that there was sufficient information contained in the submission to warrant looking at the evidence for the introduction of this screening programme on a population basis and decided to ask HIQA to examine the evidence in other jurisdictions for such a programme.

Expansion of Newborn Screening

The Committee welcomed Dr Laura Comber, HIQA, who provided us with an update on the work carried out so far on the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) for the addition of Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) to the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme. Dr Comber advised that an Expert Advisory Group would be convened shortly to support the HTA process, and the Committee will receive regular updates as the work progresses. The Committee expects to receive the completed HTA report for consideration in Q4 2023.

Updated European Council Recommendation on cancer screening

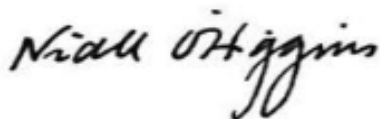
The NSAC Secretariat presented to the Committee on the updated European Council Recommendation on cancer screening which was formally adopted in December 2022. It recommends extended screening for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer, and the gradual introduction of screening for lung, prostate, and gastric cancer. The Committee noted that Ireland has well-established programmes for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer.

In line with the updated Recommendation, the Committee has already asked the team in HIQA to examine the evidence for age range expansion in the BreastCheck and BowelScreen programmes and early scoping work was considered at our 22 September 2022 meeting. We confirmed decision to proceed to full HTA for both proposals in sequence, noting that the BowelScreen programme is planning to begin some age range expansion (to age 59 years in 2023) and, given the practicalities, the Committee decided that it would be efficient to seek to complete the HTA on colorectal cancer screening age range expansion first as this would likely be extremely beneficial to the programme in its current expansion.

The Committee will consider the gradual introduction of lung, prostate, and gastric cancer again at its next meeting on 25 May 2023, noting that there are some pilot studies underway for lung and prostate cancer. We also decided to seek further information on the incidence and mortality rates of gastric cancer in Ireland.

Implementation of the updated Recommendation will be a collaborative process between the Committee, the Department of Health, and national and European stakeholders.

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Thursday 25 May 2023.



Professor Niall O'Higgins
Chair, National Screening Advisory Committee