

Lower the age for breast cancer screening in Wales from 50 to 30

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 23 Mehefin 2020
Petitions Committee | 23 June 2020

Reference: RS20/12730-3

Petition Number: P-05-961

Petition title: Lower the age for breast cancer screening in Wales from 50 to 30

Text of petition: A friend of mine was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer at the age of 36. If she had been screened this would have been detected and dealt with a lot sooner.

1. Background

Public Health Wales delivers population based national screening programmes across Wales, including [Breast Test Wales](#).

Breast screening looks for breast cancer before symptoms show and involves taking mammograms, which are x-rays of the breast. If breast cancer is detected at an early stage, treatment has the greatest chance of being successful.



The Breast Test Wales website provides the following information in relation to its breast cancer screening programme:

- Women aged **50 to 70** are automatically invited for a breast X-ray every three years.
- Breast Test Wales identifies women from its GPs' lists and invites each doctor's practice in turn. Women will not necessarily get their invitation in the year that they turn 50. If they are registered with a doctor, they will be invited for breast screening before their 53rd birthday.
- Women over the age of 70 can ask for a screening appointment every 3 years.
- Breast screening is carried out at screening centres and accessible mobile units across Wales. Taking part in breast screening is a patient's choice.
- Screening can find cancers when they are too small to see or feel. Screening will miss some cancers, and some cancers cannot be cured.
- If a mammogram shows a possible abnormality, the patient will be offered an appointment in one of Breast Test Wales' screening centres. The patient will be examined by a doctor and may be offered further tests.

Women under 50 years of age

Breast Test Wales is not able to offer an appointment to women under the age of 50. Breast Test Wales explains that currently the screening programme has only been shown to be of benefit for women over 50. If patients below the age of 50 display symptoms, they should contact their doctor for advice.

The Welsh Government's Cancer Delivery Plan for Wales 2016-2020 states that the introduction of screening programmes in Wales is based on the expert advice of the UK National Screening Committee and Wales Screening Committee to ensure programmes do more good than harm and are cost-effective.

Breast Test Wales states that although research studies have not shown a clear benefit in the general population for starting screening earlier than age 50, women at increased risk because of a family history of breast cancer may benefit from screening at an earlier age. The balance between benefit and harm from screening younger women at moderate or high risk is unknown, as research has not been undertaken for this specific group of women.

Breast Test Wales offers a breast screening service to women resident in Wales, who have been assessed by the [Genetics Service](#) and found to have an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

Statistical Reports

Breast Test Wales published its [Annual Statistical Report 2018-19](#) in March 2020. This report is a detailed summary of information on work undertaken and includes figures on screening activity, invitation, and uptake.

2. Welsh Government action

In correspondence to the Committee dated 28 May 2020, the Minister for Health and Social Services states that Wales, like the rest of the UK, follows the independent, expert advice of the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC). Routine breast screening of women under 50 without any symptoms is not offered in the UK because the UKNSC advises that the current evidence indicates that the benefits of screening do not outweigh the known harms. All recommendations are subject to regular review and should the UKNSC recommend changing the age range for breast screening, the Welsh Government will consider how this can be delivered in Wales. The UKNSC recommendation on breast screening can be found [here](#).

The Minister also notes that the benefits and harms of breast cancer screening were considered in an [independent review](#) published in 2012.

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