

PE2062/F: Introduce a National Screening Programme for Prostate Cancer

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care written submission, 7 January 2025

Thank you for your correspondence of 6th December 2024, regarding the action the Scottish Government is taking to improve diagnoses of prostate cancer in Scotland.

As you know, The Scottish Government, along with all other UK nations, relies on advice about screening programmes from the UK National Screening Committee. Whilst there have been suggestions to use the PSA test for a national screening programme, the committee has confirmed that this test alone is not accurate enough to detect prostate cancer that needs treatment.

As you state in your letter, I have written to the UK National Screening Committee to set out Scotland's support for a review of the case for a national prostate screening programme. I am also encouraged by the potential of Prostate Cancer UK's Transform study on testing strategies for prostate cancer, which will provide important evidence for such a review.

In the meantime, all men over 50 can ask their GP for a PSA test in Scotland, once the benefits and risks have been explained to them. In your letter, you reference the Scottish Government's update to our Scottish Referral Guidelines for Suspected Cancer. This review is considering the appropriate evidenced-based age range that should be included with regards to PSA testing for men at higher risk of developing prostate cancer.

A new primary care cancer education platform – Gateway C – was launched on 30 April 2024 in NHS Scotland, supported by NHS Education for Scotland (NES). Gateway C provides innovative, and tailored information to support earlier cancer diagnosis efforts, including for prostate, and enable effective decision-making. This free online platform is accessible to all primary care clinicians including pharmacists, dentists, and optometrists.

Further to this, we know that the earlier cancer is diagnosed the easier it is to treat and even cure which is why we continue to invest in our Detect Cancer Earlier (DCE) Programme, initially launched in 2012. A Detect Cancer Earlier campaign – Be The Early Bird - launched in March 2023 and ran for four weeks, aiming to reduce fear of cancer and empower those with possible symptoms to act early. Following successful independent evaluation, the campaign re-ran in September 2023 and August 2024 to prompt health-seeking behaviour, targeting those aged 40+ from areas of deprivation.

In parallel to the campaign, a Detect Cancer Early roadshow visited communities across Scotland in March 2024 to reinforce key messages – this resulted in over 6,700 engagements with the target audience.

I hope these actions demonstrate the Scottish Government's continued commitment to earlier diagnosis of prostate cancer.

Yours sincerely,

NEIL GRAY