

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 12 June 2024
11th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE2088: Help eliminate cervical cancer through improved and at home HPV testing

Introduction

Petitioner Emma Keyes

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help eliminate cervical cancer for woman and those with a cervix in Scotland by introducing at home HPV (human papillomavirus) self-sampling to enhance the smear testing programme, helping to increase the uptake and accessibility of smear testing.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2088>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 5 March 2024.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,297 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Scottish Government, which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerks to the Committee
June 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2088: Help eliminate cervical cancer through improved and at home HPV testing

Petitioner

Emma Keyes

Date Lodged

5 March 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help eliminate cervical cancer for woman and those with a cervix in Scotland by introducing at home HPV (human papillomavirus) self-sampling to enhance the smear testing programme, helping to increase the uptake and accessibility of smear testing.

Background information

While I was going through treatment for cervical cancer, I started to look into the smear programme and how we could improve it in Scotland to make smear testing easier and more accessible.

The uptake is at an all-time low and we need a testing programme that catches the disease at a pre-cancerous stage, helping woman and those with a cervix avoid harsh, life-changing cancer treatments. The Minister for Public Health & Women's Health Jenni Minto supports this.

I previously started a petition on change.org, which has gained over 2200 signatures.

Monica Lennon MSP shared my story during [a debate on Cervical Cancer Prevention Week 2023](#).

I contributed to the discussion on cervical cancer prevention at the [CPG on Women's Health meeting on 25 January 2023](#).

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on petition PE2088



Background

The petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help eliminate cervical cancer by introducing at-home HPV (human papillomavirus) self-sampling.

In 2020, 266 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer in Scotland.¹ This was a 24% reduction from the previous year when there were 350 cases.

The [Cancer incidence report from Public Health Scotland](#) notes that there was a drop (-45%) in the early detection of cervical cancers in 2020, most likely due to the pause in screening services during the pandemic.

The [most recent statistics](#) show that the proportion of those who are up to date with their cervical screening tests was 68.7%. This was down by 0.7% on the previous year.

Women from deprived areas are less likely to participate in screening (62.4%) compared to those from the least deprived areas (73.1%).

Since March 2020, the screening process was changed to include an initial screening test for HPV. Instead of all smear tests being tested in cytology (i.e. cells being viewed through a microscope), only those which have tested positive for HPV will be viewed. This change was introduced because of the link between cervical cancer and HPV. Cervical cancer is the most common HPV-linked cancer and 99% of cases are believed to be caused by HPV.

This link is not only recognised in the changes to the screening programme, but also in the commencement of the HPV vaccination programme in 2008. All young people in Scotland are now offered a vaccination in the first year of secondary school.

[Coverage of the vaccine in 2022/23](#) for S1 pupils was 76.3% for girls and 69.7% for boys.

The Petition

The petition is calling for the introduction of self-sampling for HPV. This would involve women taking a test at home and returning the sample in the post for testing. Anyone with a positive test would then be invited for a traditional smear test.

¹ https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/12498/i_cancer_female_genital_organs.xls

Self-testing is seen as a way of getting around some of the barriers to smear testing, such as embarrassment, fear, cultural barriers and appointment availability. This is an approach that has been trialled in some areas of England and in [Dumfries & Galloway](#).

Other countries, such as the Netherlands and Australia, already provide self-testing and have reported positive results in screening uptake and early detection of cervical cancer.

Screening programmes are guided by advice and recommendations of the National Screening Committee (NSC). This is a UK expert advisory group which provides advice to all four UK nations.

The NSC is expected to make a recommendation on cervical self-sampling later this year.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government published the [Women's Health Plan](#) in August 2021. This included a commitment to focus improvement activity in screening, including self-sampling in the cervical cancer screening programme.

The Scottish Government has also established the Cervical Cancer Elimination Expert Group to take forward the [World Health Organisation's target of eliminating cervical cancer](#).

An [Equity in Screening Strategy 2023-26](#) was also published in 2023 and aims to tackle inequalities within screening programmes. This strategy highlights [a systematic review](#) which found strong evidence to support self-testing for HPV in those who do not respond to a cervical screening appointment in primary care.

Scottish Parliament Action

There was a [debate on cervical cancer prevention week](#) in February 2023. There have also been several parliamentary questions on the topic, including on the potential roll-out of self-sampling (see PQ [S6W-26578](#)).

In response to this question, the Minister stated:

“The Scottish Government recognises the potential of cervical self-sampling to improve uptake of cervical screening. In Scotland, a working group has been established to consider potential models to understand any changes that would be required to the screening programme to support an initial roll-out. This work will be influenced by the on-going work of the UK NSC and emerging global research.”

Kathleen Robson
Senior Researcher (Health and Social Care)
SPICe Research

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government submission, 2 April 2024

PE2088/A: Help eliminate cervical cancer through improved and at home HPV testing

The Scottish Government, along with the other UK Nations, relies on advice from the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC), an independent expert advisory group which informs decisions taken across the UK on screening programmes. The UK NSC recognises the potential benefits of self-sampling but have concluded that there is currently insufficient evidence to recommend implementation. Studies are underway to gather further evidence as well as work to assess and validate a test for HPV self-sampling in the UK, which is expected to conclude this Spring.

Despite this, the Scottish Government acknowledges the potential self-sampling has to increase uptake levels and reduce barriers to cervical screening. A working group has been convened to assess potential models and understand any required changes to the screening programme to support an initial roll-out. This work is being informed by the emerging evidence from UK and global research, including the study undertaken in Dumfries and Galloway which provided self-sampling test kits to women between 25 and 64 who had not taken up the offer of attending for cervical screening. The results of this study showed the potential benefits of self-sampling, but also underlined the need to carefully consider how any eventual roll-out is targeted.

The UK NSC is expected to review the recommendation for cervical screening this year, including self-sampling. Should a recommendation be forthcoming to introduce HPV self-sampling then the Scottish Screening Committee will advise Scottish Ministers on how to take that recommendation forward. Further information can be found at [Cervical cancer - UK National Screening Committee \(UK NSC\) - GOV.UK \(view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk)

Public Health Capabilities