



8 November 2021

National Cervical Screening Program Update

Expansion of self-collection from 1 July 2022

We are excited to inform you that the Australian Government has announced that all women under the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) will be able to self-collect their own screening sample from **1 July 2022**. Details of this announcement can be found here: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/landmark-changes-improving-access-to-life-saving-cervical-screenings>

What you need to know

- **From 1 July 2022**, current eligibility criteria for access to self-collection under the NCSP Self-collection Policy will be removed.
- This change means that self-collection will be available to all women and people with a cervix under the NCSP and will no longer be restricted to under-screened or never-screened women.
- This change is supported by evidence showing that HPV tests performed on self-collected vaginal samples are as safe and accurate as HPV tests performed by a clinician.
- Expanding the self-collection policy will offer women and people with a cervix participating in the NCSP a choice to screen using either a self-collected vaginal sample or a clinician-collected sample, accessed through a healthcare provider in both cases.
- The change will give participants a choice in screening method – either self-collected or clinician collected.
- Expanded self-collection is a game-changer for the NCSP, expected to increase participation in cervical screening and support better outcomes in under-screened women.
- It has the potential to remove the cultural and personal barriers that currently discourage some women to screen, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and gender and sexually diverse people.
- Healthcare providers such as GPs will continue to play a critical role in supporting patients with cervical screening.
- Self-collection will continue to be accessed by participants from their primary healthcare provider.
- There will be no change in the way that health care providers order the self-collection test or consumables. They will still be available through accredited laboratories, in the same way they are today.
- The changes to expand self-collection to all participants **commence 1 July 2022**. However, women and people with a cervix who meet the current eligibility criteria for self-collection can continue to be offered self-collection as an option for cervical screening

now. This includes women who are over 30 years old and have never screened or are overdue for screening.

Next steps

- NCSP stakeholders are critical to the success of implementation of expanded self-collection.
- The Australian Government Department of Health will continue to engage and provide further information to key stakeholder groups. More detailed communications, education material and clinical guidance will be developed and shared as we approach 1 July 2022.
- This engagement will build upon that undertaken to date, including recent work by the University of Melbourne on behalf of the Department to consult with impacted stakeholders to understand the potential opportunities, barriers and issues that relate to implementing the expanded self-collection policy.
- The Department, in partnership with state and territory governments, is now working through a detailed engagement and implementation plan to prepare the NCSP sector for the change.

Background

Self-collection was introduced in December 2017 as part of the renewed NCSP but access was restricted to:

- women who have never participated in the NCSP and are 30 years of age or over; or
- women who are overdue for cervical screening by two years or longer and are 30 years of age or over.

At its meeting on 30 March/1 April 2021, the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) supported the expansion of eligibility for self-collection, following a review of available evidence showing that self-collected samples are as safe, effective and accurate as clinician collected tests. The MSAC outcome was publicly released on 21 May 2021 and published here: <http://msac.gov.au/internet/msac/publishing.nsf/Content/1664-public>

Want to know more

Please send any questions or concerns to NCSPCommittees@health.gov.au.