

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

8th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 1  
December 2021

PE1863: Mandatory annual cancer blood test  
from the age of 55

## Note by the Clerk

**Lodged:** 19 March 2021

**Petitioner** Michael Campbell

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to  
provide mandatory annual blood tests from the age of 55 to detect  
cancer.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1863>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [1 September 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to relevant stakeholders.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and responses to information requests are provided for the Committee's consideration.

## Background

3. During its consideration of this petition, the Committee received 3 written submissions.
4. The Committee received a submission from the Scottish Government which noted that it monitors and considers all evidence and recommendations from the UK National Screening Committee.
5. The Committee then wrote to the UK National Screening Committee to seek more information on research being undertaken to identify a single blood test

for cancer screening. It also wrote to relevant stakeholders seeking views on the action called for in the petition.

## UK National Screening Committee submission

6. The UK National Screening Committee's (UK NSC) submission explains that it is the independent scientific advisory body which advises Ministers on matters of population screening. This means that it would consider any proposal to consider a single blood test to detect cancers.
7. The submission notes that the UK NSC has not looked at the evidence to screen for cancers using a single blood test and that its annual call for topics to consider runs from September-December each year.
8. The UK NSC outlines the process for bringing forward screening programmes. It states that programmes are subject to evaluation and independent expert advice from the UK NSC before introduction. This is to ensure 'they do more good than harm, and at a reasonable cost'.
9. Furthermore, the submission notes that screening programmes are also subject to rigorous control and quality assurance to ensure they operate strictly within the parameters that will maximise the ratio of benefit to harm.

## Cancer Research UK submission

10. In response to the Committee's request for views, Cancer Research UK set out the current position in relation to blood tests to detect cancer. The submission notes that there has been 'a lot of research interest' in blood, urine and breath tests that could aid the detection, surveillance or ongoing monitoring of cancer.
11. However, there are no blood tests currently that can reliably detect the early signs of cancer in people without symptoms. Cancer Research UK states that 'a lot more research is needed before a general cancer blood test could be used in cancer screening'.
12. The submission provides an overview and links to further information about a large screening research trial on a single blood test which they consider to be 'crucial' in answering the following key questions:
  - whether the test can find cancer;
  - whether it can find it at an earlier stage; and
  - whether it can do that without causing undue or unreasonable levels of harm
13. Cancer Research UK concludes that 'regrettably we cannot endorse his petition, but we hope that it will not be too much longer before a general cancer blood test suitable for use in cancer screening becomes available'.

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

### **Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting –

- [PE1863/A: Scottish Government submission of 19 May 2021](#)
- [PE1863/B: Cancer Research UK submission of 5 October 2021](#)
- [PE1863/C: UK National Screening Committee submission of 6 October 2021](#)

Written submissions received on the petition after can be viewed on its [new webpage](#).