

# Don't fear the smear

## 2019 Annual Meeting Resolution

*"Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives a year, yet attendance is currently at its lowest for a decade. The NFWI urges WI members to attend routine screening, to take action to raise awareness of the importance of cervical screening and address barriers to attendance to help eradicate cervical cancer"*

*Proposed by Disley WI, Cheshire Federation  
Passed by 97% majority*

### What is the issue?

This campaign seeks to raise awareness of the importance of attending routine cervical screening, and support more women to make an informed decision about whether or not to take up their invitations. It also calls on WI members to help make cervical screening more accessible by tackling barriers to attendance.

### Why does this matter?

Regular cervical screening (also referred to as a 'smear test') is the best way for abnormal cells to be picked up early and treated (if necessary) to prevent cancer developing. It is estimated that the test currently prevents 70% of cervical cancer deaths. However, this figure could be 83% if all eligible women attended.

According to statistics published by NHS Digital, 71.4% of eligible women in England had been screened within the specified time frame as of March 2018. This is a decrease from 75.7% in 2011, and the fourth year in a row that coverage has fallen.<sup>1</sup> Attendance is lowest amongst women aged 25 to 29 (61.1%), yet cervical cancer is the most common cancer among women under the age of 35. Other frequent non-attenders include: women over 50; ethnic minorities; people from lower socio-economic groups; women with learning disabilities; and lesbian and bisexual women.

In Wales, the number of women attending has also fallen slightly in recent years. As of March 2018, 76.1% of eligible women had been screened at least once within the last 5 years, a drop from 77.8% in 2015/16.

### What would we like to achieve?

Full details about the campaign and actions for members to take will be set out in a new action pack which will be sent to all WIs in the August mailing. Here we provide a brief outline of our early plans and objectives.

- To empower federations and WIs to take action that will help to improve local awareness of the benefits of cervical screening.
- To engage WI members in discussions around the barriers to cervical screening, and how these can be addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Coverage is defined as the percentage of women in a population eligible for screening at a given point in time who were screened adequately within a specified period.

- To explore WI members' experiences and perceptions of the cervical screening programme.
- To contribute to existing national campaigns that aim to increase awareness of the benefits of cervical screening, and improve uptake.
- To contribute to discussions around potential changes to the cervical screening programme, such as in relation to increasing the upper age limit.
- To encourage local authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), and GPs to raise awareness of screening and take steps to address the barriers to attendance.

### Get involved - some ideas for initial campaign actions

- **Register your interest in taking part in NFWI research.** National health bodies have a limited understanding of why many women are not attending cervical screening. To help change this, the NFWI will be launching a survey about members' views and personal experiences of screening. If you would be interested in taking part, please fill out the form below and send it back to the NFWI. This form can be photocopied and used multiple times, or you can get in touch with the Public Affairs Department using the contact details below to express an interest in getting involved. Your information will only be used to contact you about this research.
- **Share your stories with us.** To raise awareness of the importance of attending cervical screening, we would love to hear why this issue is important to you. It doesn't need to be a personal experience, but please be careful not to name other people unless they have given their permission for you to do so. In support of the mandate, stories that are shared with us may be used to promote cervical screening in NFWI Public Affairs resources, WI Life, and on our social media channels. You can of course remain anonymous if you wish to.

### Get in touch!

If you would like to receive monthly e-updates from our campaigns please sign up to the Public Affairs Digest through the campaigns home page:  
<https://www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns>

- **Email:** [pa@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:pa@nfwl.org.uk)
- **Post:** NFWI PA department, 104 New Kings Road, London, SW6 4LY
- **Telephone:** 020 7371 9300 ext 238



Cut along the dotted line and send back to the address above.

***I would be willing to take part in NFWI research about my views and experiences of cervical screening***

Your name: .....

WI, Federation: .....

Contact email or postal address: .....

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*If you have any questions about how your personal information will be used please contact [dataprotection@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:dataprotection@nfwl.org.uk)*