

## Introduction

This is the sixth report issued by the National Centre for Screening Monitoring (Osservatorio Nazionale Screening, ONS). The number of reports published is proof of the constant effort of Italian Regions and programmes in monitoring Italy's screening services. A major turning point occurred in 2004 with the National Screening Plan (Law 138) issued by the Ministry of Health – CCM (National Centre for Prevention and Disease Control), as well as the agreement with the Health Commission of the Conference of the Presidents of the Regions and Self-governing Provinces. The Ministry of Health intends to continue to lend its full support to screening improvement. Moreover, on behalf of the CCM, the ONS has developed several specific projects, such as supporting and tutoring of Southern Regions, implementation of a national database based on individual records, the diffusion of guidelines, professional training and associated instruments (e.g., the CCM website), with the aim of expanding the actual offer at a national level, as well as improving quality.

A major effort is thus being made – but what is the actual status of screening programmes? Do they show progress, a steady trend, or regression? Overall, they are progressing, although slowly. National coverage is now 78% for mammography screening (see papers by Giorgi et al. and Giordano et al.), and approximately 70% for cervical screening (see Ronco et al.). A gap between Northern and Central Regions and Southern Regions persists, although there has been an improvement: Southern Italy and Islands now have a 45% coverage for mammography screening and almost 66% for cervical screening, which represents a major improvement as

compared to previous years. Rapid progress is also evident for colorectal screening (see Zorzi et al.): approximately 50% coverage was reached in less than three years, although this occurred mostly in Northern and Central Italy. At the moment, Italy is one of the few countries in Europe that has implemented a national colorectal screening programme.

The gap with the Southern Regions is still present as to clinical performance, but something has started to change, and this is not only evident from the data presented in the surveys. The report shows that screening has been recently implemented in two previously uncovered Regions, Sardegna and Puglia, and the first results can already be observed. Data from the other previously uncovered Region, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in Northern Italy, are quite better. Thus far we have discussed coverage, but coverage is known to be a poor indicator of the real offer of screening tests and of their quality. The ONS surveys do not analyse only the screening episode, but they make an attempt to investigate the entire assessment and treatment process. Thus, as in the previous reports, the survey analyses the quality of breast cancer treatment (see Mano et al.) and of assessment and treatment of cervical lesions (see Volante et al.). In conclusion, we can say that although we have come a long way, a lot of work still needs to be done to complete the coverage of screening programmes throughout Italy and to improve their performance.

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