

Progress of breast cancer screening in Switzerland

Until now it was only in the French-speaking part of Switzerland that all women were able to take part in quality-controlled breast cancer screening programmes.

However, last year the programmes in the French-speaking part of Switzerland have joined forces and founded the Swiss association for breast cancer screening programmes to send out a strong political signal. In January 2010 the first screening programme is starting in the canton of St. Gallen in the German-speaking part of Switzerland



and in addition, by unanimously accepting a corresponding motion, the Swiss Parliament, both the National Council and the Council of States, is ensuring the long-term funding of mammography screening.

It appears that the cultural divide, or "Röstigraben", which has existed in mammography screening between the Germanic and Romance parts of Switzerland is slowly starting to narrow. Hitherto, alongside partly differing assessments of its effectiveness, the legal time limit set on funding for health insurance in particular might well have been a reason for the hesitant attitude in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Now, acceptance of the motion by the National Council earlier this year and by the Council of States on 22 September 2009 means that funding will be extended until a new statutory provision is applied to this screening measure.

With the founding of the national association, existing programmes are strengthening their determination to work together and, by promoting equal opportunities for access to screening programmes



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for all women in Switzerland, contributing to achieving equal opportunities in medical provision. The association has set itself the aim of both coordinating programme activities and harmonising standards and processes according to European guidelines on quality, in order to make the programmes highly effective. Partnerships are currently being formed at national level and processes defined in order to implement comprehensive procedures.

The first women will be able to have a mammogram under the screening programme in the canton of St. Gallen coming January. From next year two additional programmes are expected to take place in the cantons of Graubünden and Bern. Given impetus by this positive political decision, relevant discussions and preparatory work are also taking place in other cantons. The aim is to ensure that, as soon as possible, all women over 50 will have access to a quality-controlled mammography screening programme every two years in Switzerland.