

Traveller champion Training plan

Don't be stuck

**Supporting
Travellers to
reduce their
risk of cancer
and seek early
diagnosis**

Duration: 2 hours

Group Size: 6–12 participants (adults)

Facilitators: 1 lead facilitator (e.g. health worker / community educator) and 1 support person (ideally health worker / community educator from the traveller community)

CONTACT

- Don't be stuck toolkit (1 per participant)
- Don't be stuck animation
- Persona story cards (tom, mary, patrick)
- Spot the signs sheet
- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Markers / pens / post-its
- Roleplay prompt cards
- Tea/coffee, comfortable seating
- Optional: short animation or printed storyboard visuals



Session overview

0:00–0:10	Welcome & introductions	Build trust, explain the purpose of the session.
0:10–0:25	Icebreaker: “Don’t be stuck” moments	Get people sharing small examples of times they reached out for help or helped someone else.
0:25–0:45	Understanding the message	Explore the stigma, fears, and barriers from the focus group findings.
0:45–1:15	Roleplay 1 – “Taking the first step”	Practice conversations using personas (Tom, Mary, Patrick).
1:15–1:35	Spot the signs & talking tips	Review the key health messages and practice explaining them simply.
1:35–1:55	Roleplay 2 – “Champion in action”	Champions practice supporting someone to seek help.
1:55–2:00	Wrap-up & next steps	Reflection and encouragement to use toolkit in the community.

Useful information:

- **Lower trust in healthcare providers.** 41% of Travellers report full trust in health professionals, compared with ~83% of the general population. Source: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS).
- **Reluctance to speak to GP reception staff.** 37% of Travellers do not want to discuss symptoms with receptionists, creating a barrier to appointments. Source: NCCP / HSE Traveller Cancer Research (2025).
- **Fear of finding out discourages care-seeking.** 32% of Travellers fear what might be found; 19% avoid screening due to fear of results. Source: NCCP / HSE Traveller Cancer Research (2025).
- **Embarrassment affects screening uptake.** 21% of Travellers cite embarrassment as a barrier; 62.5% of men report embarrassment as a barrier to bowel screening. Source: Codesigned Cancer Screening Barriers Study.
- **Cost remains a barrier to accessing care.** 24% of Travellers report difficulty affording healthcare, vs ~10% of the general population. Source: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS).
- **Low uptake of bowel screening.** Participation is very low: 12.5% of men and 19.2% of women. Source: Codesigned Cancer Screening Barriers Study.
- **Community-based supports improve engagement.** Traveller Community Health Workers are more trusted than GPs for screening support. Source: NCCP / Pavee Point Traveller Research.
- **Cancer remains a leading cause of death in under-25s (excluding accidents),** emphasizing the importance of early awareness and access to care. Source: NCRI cancer trends report. National Cancer Registry Ireland

Session breakdown

0:00–0:10 – Welcome & introductions



Facilitator says:

"Today is about building confidence - to help others take the first step when it comes to their health. You're not doctors, you're community supporters - the bridge between fear and help."



Activities:

- Short round: name, where you're from, one word for what "Don't Be Stuck" means to you.
- Explain that this is a safe, no-judgment space.

0:10–0:25 – Icebreaker: "Don't Be Stuck" Moments



Facilitator says:

"Can you think of a time you or someone you know nearly didn't go to the doctor, but did - or didn't - in the end?"



Activities:

- Share in pairs then ask for one or two short stories back to whole room.
- Facilitator links responses to emotions like courage, family, and fear – the same themes found in materials.



Session breakdown

0:25–0:45 – Understanding the Message



Facilitator says:

- Why might people be afraid to go to the doctor?
- What do people say about cancer in our community?
- What makes it hard to ask for help?



Activities:

Short discussion using flipchart prompts. Again ask to discuss in pairs or small groups then elicit short answers from room.



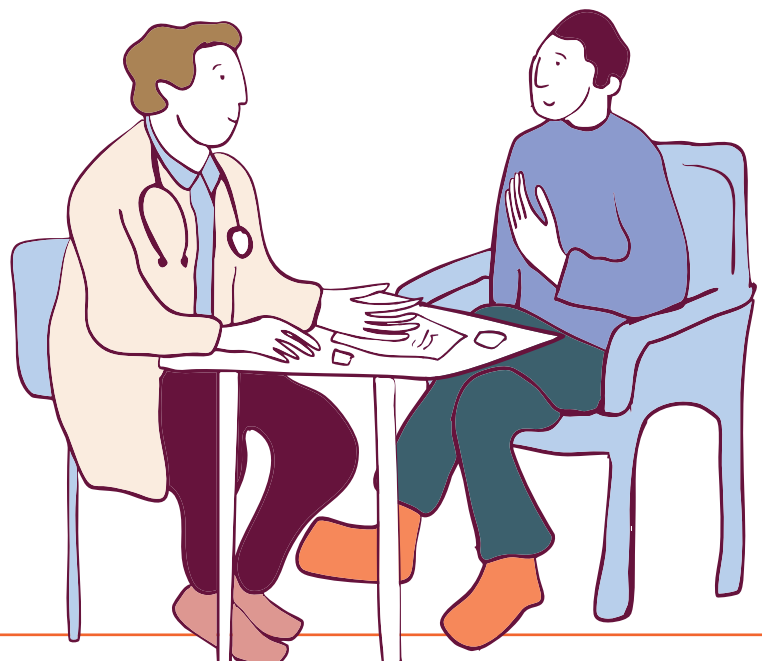
Facilitator asks for and lists short responses under headings such as:

- Fears / stigma
- Trust / support
- What helps?



Key messages to highlight:

- "You're not alone."
- "Taking the first step shows strength."
- "Privacy and trust are important."
- "It's okay to bring someone with you."



Session breakdown

0:45–1:15 – Roleplay 1 “Taking the First Step”



Purpose:

Practise listening and gentle encouragement.



Set-up:

- Show the Don't Be Stuck short animation (or use leaflet stories if no screen is available).
- Divide into pairs or small groups.
- Each group takes one persona card: Tom, Mary, or Patrick.
- One person plays the Traveller seeking help; the other is the Champion.



Prompt examples:

- Tom says: “I don't want to bother the doctor.”
- Mary says: “I'm worried about my sister but don't want to upset her.”
- Patrick says: “I'm too young for that kind of thing.”



Champion's task:

- Listen first.
- Acknowledge feelings (fear, embarrassment, mistrust).
- Encourage one-small-step answers (talk to doctor, visit Traveller Centre, tell a friend).

“You're not alone.”

“Taking the first step shows strength.”

“Privacy and trust are important.”

“It's okay to bring someone with you.”



Facilitator reflection questions:

- What was hard about the conversation?
- What words helped?
- How did it feel to be listened to?



Session breakdown

1:35–1:55 – Roleplay 2: “Champion in action”



Purpose:

Build confidence in real-life conversations.



Set-up:

- Use the scenario cards
- Divide into pairs or small groups.
- Each group takes a card
- Champions practise how to respond using empathy, reassurance, and clear next steps.



Card / Prompt examples:

“Your neighbour says she's too nervous to go to Breast Check.”

“A friend keeps cancelling GP appointments.”

“Someone says, ‘If it's cancer, I don't want to know.’”



Champion's task:

- Listen first.
- Acknowledge feelings (fear, embarrassment, mistrust).
- Encourage one small step answers (talk to doctor, visit Traveller Centre, tell a friend).

“You're not alone.”

“Taking the first step shows strength.”

“Privacy and trust are important.”

“It's okay to bring someone with you.”



Facilitator prompts / questions:

- What could you say that's kind but encouraging?
- How can you show you care without pushing?
- What small steps can you suggest?



Session breakdown

1:55–2:00 – Wrap-Up & Next Steps



Reflection prompts:

“What will you take away from today?”

“What’s one thing you could say to someone who’s stuck?”



Round up:

Distribute toolkit packs and thank participants for their time.

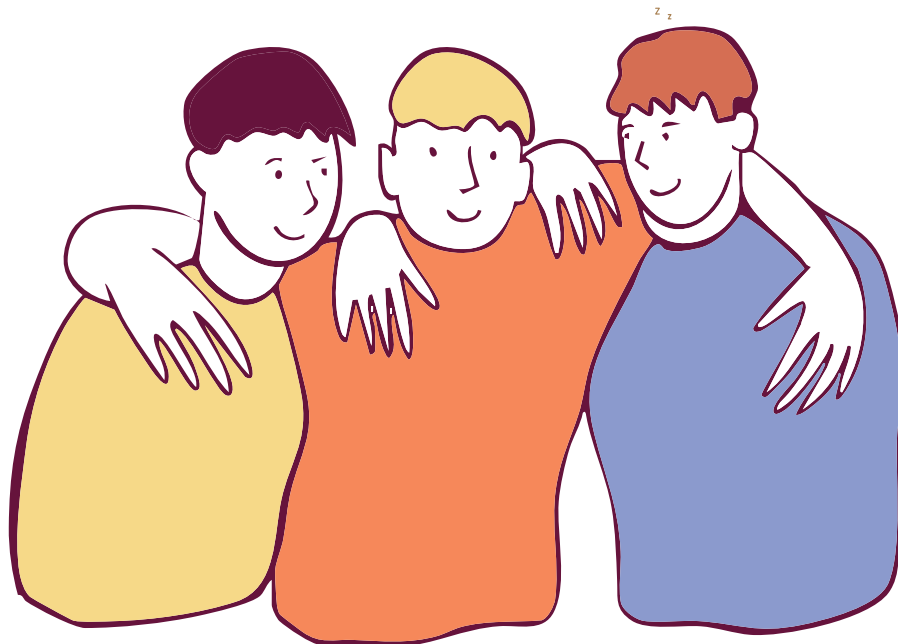
Encourage participants to:

- Share the materials in their community.
- Use and share the ‘Don’t be stuck’ animation or leaflets with the community.
- Stay connected for follow-up training or support.
- “It only takes one person to help another take the first step.”



Optional Add-ons (if extending to 2.5–3 hours)

- Group discussion: “How can we share this message in our area?”
- Invite a local Traveller Health Worker or nurse to speak briefly about supports available



Spot the signs of cancer early

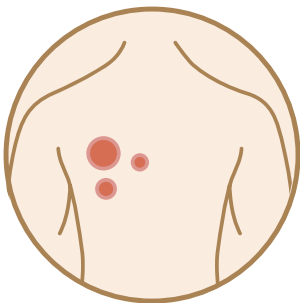


See your gp or
health worker
if you notice:



A cough or hoarse voice that lasts

Especially if it's gone on for more than 3 weeks.



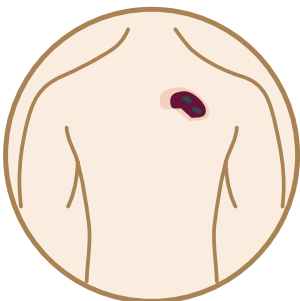
A lump or swelling

Anywhere on your body - especially if it's new or not going away.



Unusual bleeding or discharge

From anywhere - coughing, urine (pee), stools (poo), or between periods.



A mole or skin change

A change in size, colour, shape, or a sore that doesn't heal.



Weight loss or tiredness you can't explain

Feeling constantly tired or losing weight without trying.



Pain that won't go away

Ongoing pain with no clear reason - even if it's mild.



Anything that feels wrong for you

You know your body best - if something feels off, get it checked.

REMEMBER

Most symptoms won't be cancer - but it's always best to check.
Seeing your doctor early gives you the best chance if something needs treatment.

Being brave means looking after your health.

“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



Tom's Story: “I don't want to bother the doctor.”

Tom's had chest pain for weeks.

Says he's fine - doesn't want to waste the doctor's time.

He's had bad experiences before.

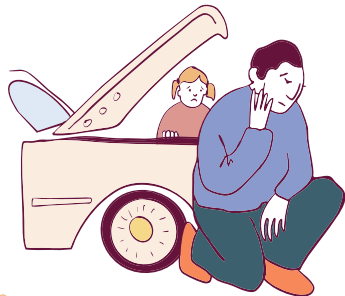


What can make it easier?

- How can you help him feel at ease?
- What small step could he take today?
- What might you say to keep his pride but still act?

Research shows lower trust affects openness with professionals

~41% report full trust in healthcare professionals, compared with ~83% of the general population. Source: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS).



“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



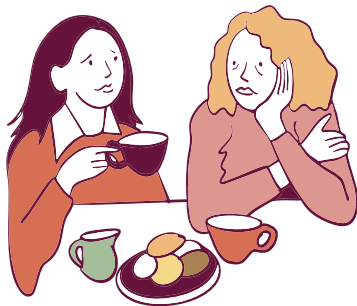
Mary's Story: “I don't want to upset her.”

Mary's worried about her sister - she looks unwell.
Mary's afraid to say anything in case she upsets her.



What can make it easier?

- What could Mary say to show care, not worry?
- How can she gently start the talk?
- How could you help her feel brave enough to speak up?



Research shows some Travellers avoid discussing illness to prevent worry, stigma or burdening family members.

Source: UCC qualitative Traveller health research; NCCP Traveller Cancer Awareness reports.

“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



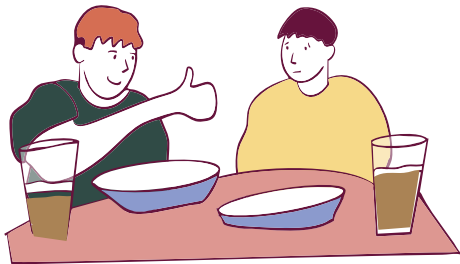
Patrick's Story: “I'm too young for that.”

Patrick finds a lump but laughs it off.
Thinks cancer's only for older people.



What can make it easier?

- What could you say to help him take it seriously?
- How can you make him feel it's normal to get checked?
- How could you help him act soon without fear?



Cancer remains a leading cause of death in under-25s (excluding accidents). Source: NCRI cancer trends report.

“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



“It costs too much.”

Someone says, “I’d go, but it’s too expensive - and they don’t do much anyway.”



What can make it easier?

- What free or low-cost options could you tell them about?
- How would you explain it simply?
- What could help them take that first step?



Cost remains a barrier to accessing care. 24% of Travellers report difficulty affording healthcare, vs ~10% of the general population. Source: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS).

“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



“I missed my appointment.”

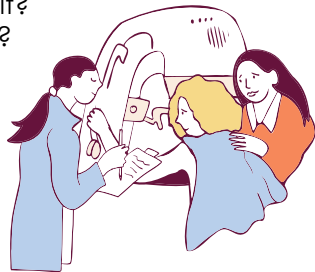
Someone says, “I was meant to go for screening, but I didn’t show up. I was nervous.”



What can make it easier?

- How can you help them feel okay about it?
- What could you say to help them rebook?
- How might you offer support next time?

Embarrassment affects screening uptake. 21% of Travellers cite embarrassment as a barrier; 62.5% of men report embarrassment as a barrier to bowel screening. Source: Codedigned Cancer Screening Barriers Study.



“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



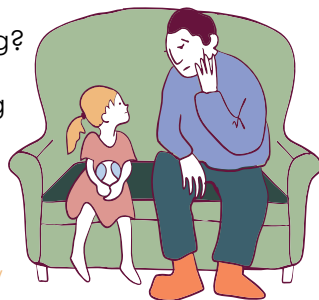
“If it’s cancer, I’d rather not know.”

Someone says, “I’ve seen what it does -
I’d rather not know.”



What can make it easier?

- How can you show care without pushing?
- What could you say to give hope?
- How can you remind them that knowing early gives choices?



Fear of finding out discourages care-seeking. 32% of Travellers fear what might be found; 19% avoid screening due to fear of results. Source: NCCP / HSE Traveller Cancer Research (2025).

“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



“I don’t trust doctors.”

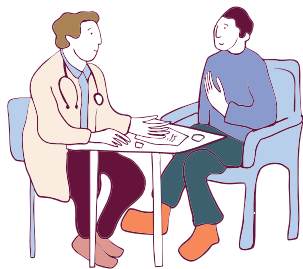
Someone says, “They made me feel stupid last time.”



What can make it easier?

- How can you show you understand?
- What might rebuild a bit of trust?
- How could you help them find someone they feels safe with?

Lower trust in healthcare providers. 41% of Travellers report full trust in health professionals, compared with ~83% of the general population. Source: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS).



“Taking the first step”

Prompt card



“I don’t like talking to my doctor’s receptionist.”

Someone says, “I don’t feel like they understand and I don’t want to talk to them about my symptoms.”



What can make it easier?

What encouragement might you offer to help them speak to a receptionist and make an appointment?

Reluctance to speak to GP reception staff. 37% of Travellers do not want to discuss symptoms with receptionists, creating a barrier to appointments. Source: NCCP / HSE Traveller Cancer Research (2025).



Recommendations

When supporting travellers
with health concerns

Don't be
 stuck

A Guide To
Supporting Trust In
Cancer Risk
Reduction And Early
Diagnosis In Traveller
Community



Understanding the fear and stigma

For many Travellers, seeking help - especially around cancer or serious illness - takes huge courage.

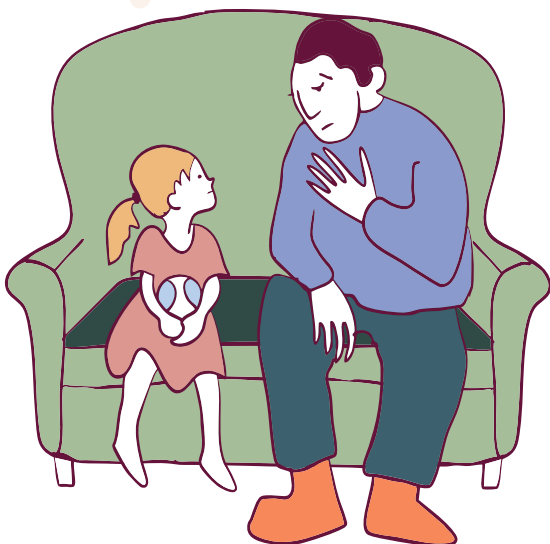


Fear, mistrust, and stigma make that first step a big one.

If someone behaves confidently it doesn't mean they feel it.

What we heard from the community

I don't want to burden anyone or appear weak



Focus group responses:

- Cancer is a "horrible word." It's linked with death and fear, not recovery.
- Privacy is vital. Many prefer to keep illness to themselves or within the family.
- Men may see illness as weakness. Admitting fear can be hard.
- Mistrust of the system. Past experiences of being dismissed, judged, or misunderstood linger.
- Low literacy and "doctor's talk." Complicated language can make people feel less intelligent or excluded.
- Fear of gossip. Confidentiality is essential.
- Faith, family, and pride are important sources of strength.
- Avoidance is common. Some believe, "It's better not to know."

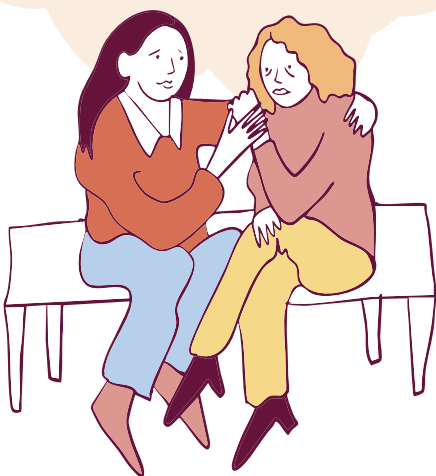
What this means for you

When a Traveller person comes to you, they may have overcome fear, shame, and mistrust just to walk through the door.

You are not just providing care - you're helping rebuild confidence in a system that may not have felt safe before.

Key tips for working with traveller people

How You Make Someone Feel Matters More Than What You Say - help by giving hope, not lectures - even one small change can reduce cancer risk



Be welcoming and genuine

- Smile, greet warmly, and use names where possible.
- Offer small gestures - a seat, a drink, or extra time if needed.
- Treat each person as an individual, not a stereotype. Build trust slowly
- Be patient - trust may take time.
- Don't jump into personal questions; let them share in their own time.
- Keep promises. If you say you'll follow up, do it.
- Consistency builds safety.
- Reflect on your own conscious or unconscious bias; do you have negative or stereotypical opinions towards Travellers?

Offer support, not judgement, around health behaviours linked with cancer risk

People may feel shame or worry about being judged. You can:

- Encourage small, positive steps.
- Listen without blaming.
- Acknowledge how hard change can be.
- Explain that behaviours like smoking, alcohol use, diet, sunbed use, and weight can affect cancer risk - but support is available and no one needs to make changes alone.

Complicated Language Is A Barrier To Health

Do I have unconscious opinions about this person?



Use plain, clear language

- Avoid jargon. Use simple, direct words and examples.
- Check understanding without making people feel tested: "Does that make sense?"
- Write things down or use visual aids where possible.
- Avoid acronyms and long explanations

Respect privacy

- Reassure that everything is confidential.
- Offer a private space to talk.
- Never discuss their situation within earshot of others.
- Be aware that fear of gossip is a real barrier.

Show understanding of barriers

- Reassure that everything is confidential.
- Offer a private space to talk.
- Never discuss their situation within earshot of others.
- Be aware that fear of gossip is a real barrier.

Encourage, don't lecture

- Focus on positives: "You did the right thing coming in."
- Praise small steps - they matter.
- Avoid making people feel blamed or shamed for delays.
- Use hope, not fear.

Acknowledge culture and family

- Understand that family involvement is often key.
- Respect, faith and community as sources of comfort.
- For men, name the difficulty: "It's not easy to talk about this."
- Encourage support - "Bring someone you trust with you next time."

What to do and want to avoid when supporting traveller people:

DO

- Do** use plain, everyday language.
- Do** give the person time to talk and ask questions.
- Do** listen without judgment - show you believe what they're saying.
- Do** respect privacy and confidentiality.
- Do** acknowledge the courage it took to come in.
- Do** offer to explain things twice or write them down.
- Do** show warmth and humanity - a smile, patience, kindness.
- Do** involve family or a support person if the patient wants.
- Do** offer choices and explain next steps clearly.
- Do** acknowledge past bad experiences if they mention them.
- Do** follow through on what you promise.

DON'T

- Don't** use medical jargon or formal speech that confuses.
- Don't** rush them or interrupt.
- Don't** dismiss their concerns or talk down to them.
- Don't** discuss their case with others unless necessary and agreed.
- Don't** say "You should've come sooner."
- Don't** assume understanding or make them feel embarrassed for asking.
- Don't** act rushed, distant, or overly formal.
- Don't** insist on privacy if the person feels safer with someone there.
- Don't** overwhelm them with too many instructions at once.
- Don't** get defensive or make excuses for the system.
- Don't** make commitments you can't keep.

Communication In Practice

Situation

Traveller person is quiet or hesitant

Unsure about what was said

Worried about cost

Fear of bad news

Missed appointment

Better approach

"It's okay, take your time. We can talk about it together."

"Would you like me to explain that another way?"

"Let's see what supports are available - you might not have to pay."

"Many things can cause this - getting checked early gives us more choices."

"I'm glad you got in touch to let us know / came in today. Let's pick up from here."

Why it works

Shows patience, reduces pressure.

Normalises questions.

Removes financial fear.

Brings hope and control.

Keeps the door open for return visits.



REMEMBER:

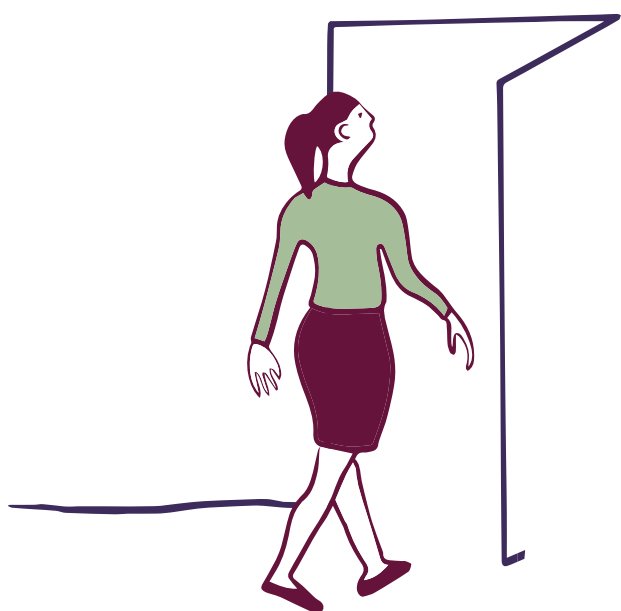
Every small
step counts

- Listening and kindness build trust.
- Respect and time create safety.
- One positive experience can change how a whole family - or community - feels about seeking help.

“If you treat one
Traveller well, the
rest will hear about
it.” – Traveller
Community Worker

Final message

When a Traveller person reaches out,
it's not “just another appointment.”
It's a moment of bravery - a bridge
between fear and hope.



“Be the person
who makes that
first step easier”.

Thank you for caring.

Facts – Health Service Engagement Among Travellers

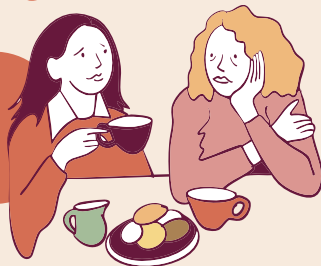
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- **Community-based supports improve engagement**
Traveller Community Health Workers are more trusted than GPs for screening support. Source: NCCP / Pavee Point Traveller Research.
- **Avoidance of talking about health within families**
Qualitative research shows some Travellers avoid discussing illness to prevent worry, stigma or burdening family members. Source: UCC qualitative Traveller health research; NCCP Traveller Cancer Awareness reports.

Useful Contacts and Resources (Ireland)

- **Reducing cancer risk (HSE):** www2.hse.ie/conditions/cancer/reduce-risk/
- **Information for patients, families and the public:** www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/patient/
- **Irish Cancer Society Free Support Line:** 1800 200 700
- **Traveller Health Units – Regional coordination and support.**
- **Primary Health Care Projects (PHCPs) – Local Traveller-led health projects.**
- **Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre:** www.paveepoint.ie
- **National Traveller Health Network:** www.travellerhealth.ie
- **HSE Live:** 1800 700 700 – Free information and service advice.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

You don't have to face it alone.



Small steps can make a big difference.



See your doctor if something doesn't feel right.



Get screened when invited — it's free and quick.



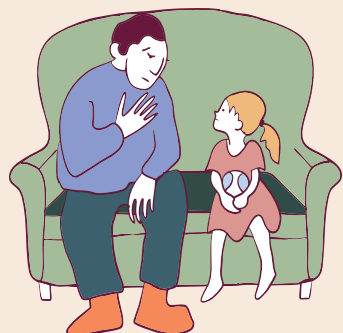
Talk to someone you trust.



Bring a friend or family member to appointments — it's okay to ask questions or take notes.



Traveller Centres, nurses, and doctors are here to help.



Hiding it won't make it go away.

WHERE TO GET HELP IN IRELAND

The sooner you act, the better your chances.



Your GP / Local Doctor

Ask for an appointment — you can bring someone with you.

Traveller Health Projects and Centres

Trusted people who can help you book or explain appointments.

Screening Programmes:

Cervical Check:
www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck

Breast Check:
www.hse.ie/breastcheck

Bowel Screen:
www.hse.ie/bowelscreen

Traveller Health Unit / Local Primary Health Care Project

Ask your local Traveller Centre for details.



This leaflet has been developed and produced by The Cork & Kerry Traveller Health Action Group (THAG)

Don't be stuck



Health comes first for you and your family



Taking care of your health and getting things checked isn't weakness — it's strength.

Be brave, take the first step.

Tom's story



"Daddy, why don't you come out and play?"



TRAVELLERS CENTRE



"Don't be stuck, Tom - will we go with you to see your GP? It might be nothing, but best to check."

"Glad you came in Tom"



"It's better to know early. You don't have to face it alone."



Mary's story

She keeps saying she's fine... but she's not herself



"You know I love you - maybe get that checked? I'll come with you."



"Don't worry, the screening won't take long."



"Sometimes caring means speaking up - even when it's hard."

"I'm glad you said something."

Patrick's story

I'm only 20 - can't be serious.



"You should get that checked, it's not a big deal'."



"Good you came in, Patrick - always better to be sure."



"It's not weak to get checked - it's smart."

Spot the signs

If you spot any of these, get checked early: lumps, changes in moles or skin, pain that won't go away, long cough, unusual bleeding or discharge, weight loss or tiredness you can't explain, or anything that feels wrong.