



**Northern Ireland
Confederation**
for Health and Social Care

Securing the Health and Wellbeing of our Population 2022-2027

Informing the public debate ahead of the May 2022 Northern
Ireland Assembly Elections

April 2022

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Our Priorities

Investment in Workforce



Implementation of the *Health and Care Workforce Strategy 2026* is essential to address our significant workforce gaps. This must be complemented by adequate investment and support for staff to ensure the health and social care (HSC) is recognised as a great place to work

Sustainable Funding



To recover and transform, we need a sustained funding package and a three-year budget to support effective planning. Any funding shortfalls will significantly limit progress. We must have ambitious but realistic expectations within the funding envelope agreed

Redesigning services – Accessing value



There are significant opportunities to improve the design of service delivery, but these have traditionally been met with resistance. We invite service users and the public to co-create new models of care and propose the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on this vital conversation

Collaborative & Empowered Leaders



We must build on progress to date to invest in more collaborative ways of working, tapping into leadership in communities, partners, patients and our staff

Recovery and Transformation



Prioritise the recovery of our services and address unacceptable waiting times, while seizing opportunities for transformation

Population Health Approach



As we move to an integrated care planning model, we must invest in prevention and addressing inequalities, working in partnership with communities and wider partners

Our Priorities

Mental Health



Our new Mental Health Strategy has been co-created with patients and partners, emphasising the need for parity of esteem between physical and mental health. We call for adequate funding and the continued support of our partners to deliver this ambitious agenda

Social Care



We welcome recent progress on the proposals from the 2017 *Power to People* report, and current consultations on the reform of Adult Social Care and Children's Services and call for progressive action to deliver for our citizens

Investment in Technology



There must be a sustained focus on implementation of our new suite of digital strategies, supported by adequate staff training to access the considerable benefits that technology and data can offer to drive efficiencies and better outcomes

Engaged Patients, Public and Partners



Learning from international experience we call for a change of culture, inviting citizens, our partners and staff all to be involved in keeping people well and active at home

Innovation and Economy



Having a strong and fair economy will drive up health outcomes. There are many opportunities for the HSC to embrace innovation, and contribute in local economies as part of our recovery strategy

Net Zero Carbon



At COP26, the HSC committed to reaching net zero as part of the global effort to tackle climate change. Staff and partners must be well-supported to proactively drive this agenda

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Confederation for Health and Social Care (NICON) is the voice of the organisations working across Northern Ireland's integrated Health and Social Care system (HSC) and is part of the wider NHS Confederation in England and Wales.

This report represents the collective views of our members, with the intention of informing the public debate in the run up to the May 2022 Assembly election.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care system was under mounting pressure. A series of strategic reviews had concluded that significant service redesign, and sustained investment would be necessary to address the long-term needs of our population.¹ The pandemic has considerably worsened the situation, and unsurprisingly, health consistently ranks as a key concern in the public's mind.²

Yet over the last two years, colleagues at all levels in the HSC have demonstrated exceptional compassion, collaboration and creativity to lead wholesale change across the system. Widescale vaccination programmes, Nightingales Centres, digital ways of working, and new elective care centres are all noteworthy examples of the swift pace at which change has been implemented.

As political parties develop their election manifestos in the runup to the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election, we must build on this renewed energy for change, to deliver amidst what are undoubtedly immense challenges. This document sets out the priorities agreed by the Northern Ireland Confederation of Health and Social Care members.

While the challenge is truly unprecedented, our members believe that there is significant opportunity to make real progress, by delivering our bold reform agenda and placing health and social care at the heart of all we do as a nation. Our call to the public and politicians alike is to support us to support you; so that we can ensure our health care system parallels the best in the world.

Michael Bloomfield

**Chair, NICON
Chief Executive, NI Ambulance Service Trust**



Our Vision

Members agree that the vision that our citizens ‘lead long, healthy, and active lives’ and the four ambitions for reform agenda set out in *Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together*,³ our 10-year strategy, remain at the core of our ambition and continue to align with international best practice.

- **Building capacity in communities and in prevention**
- **Providing more support in primary care**
- **Reforming our community and hospital services**
- **Organising ourselves to deliver**

Although we have seen significant strides over the past five years to deliver in these key areas,⁴ the pandemic has severely hampered progress, creating additional pressure and demand for services, while Northern Ireland’s waiting times continue to deteriorate. If we are to recover and get back on track to deliver world-class services, members agree there are four core enablers, complemented by a set of 8 supporting activities that must be prioritised in the new Mandate.

“This is a time of unprecedented challenge for our nations. Driving change in our health care must form a turning point to create a cultural revolution in how we deliver services. The NHS Confederation is at the forefront of bringing new ideas, challenge and support to our health and care systems in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This report sets out our members’ views, based on international best practice, and calls for a revitalised national mission, system leadership and local engagement approach. I commend this report to the public and politicians alike – the work undertaken now will shape the health and wellbeing of the citizens of Northern Ireland for years to come.”

Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive, NHS Confederation



Four Core priorities

To support healthcare leaders to deliver this vision at the necessary pace and scale, **four core, interrelated enablers** must be in place:

1. Investment in Workforce

Workforce capacity is central to the functioning of our entire health and social care system. However, there are currently significant gaps in our medical, nursing and social care workforce. The impact of a prolonged period of underinvestment is apparent in the form of widespread vacancies and unsustainable levels of reliance on agency staff. The pandemic has further exacerbated staff shortages, with soaring absence rates and reports of staff leaving the HSC early due to burnout being cause for serious concern.⁵ While the latest workforce statistics show an increase in the number of WTE staff across virtually all groupings, this rate of growth has been outmatched by the parallel increase in demand.⁶

Such staff shortages ultimately translate into increased waiting times, reduced quality and safety and undue pressure on existing staff. Breaking this vicious cycle and securing the right workforce will be key in leading recovery and shaping our services for the future. We must act to **ensure we have the optimum number of staff in place** to deliver both core services and the variety of new strategies that will facilitate transformation. This will require **long-term workforce planning** that is robustly backed up with adequate, recurrent funding, according to the renewed action plan of the *Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026*.⁷

Finally, there is a pressing need to care for our workforce as they care for our citizens, following over two years of relentless pressures. This must be supported by cultural change to **ensure the HSC is seen as an attractive place to work**, wherein our workforce feel valued, supported and empowered to lead in their own service areas. Evidence indicates that placing mental health and wellbeing at the forefront of our recovery efforts will be particularly important as we seek to rebuild our services post-pandemic – Something we simply cannot do without our staff.⁸

“Having the right workforce is the single biggest challenge for our system – we have made good progress on planning, but we need sustained funding to ensure we can recruit and retain our workforce for the future”

Jacqui Kennedy, Director of HR, Belfast HSC Trust



2. Sustainable Funding

HSC leaders require a sustained funding package over a three-year period to support rebuilding and recovery, prioritise waiting lists, meet rising demand, and continue the transformation journey. In the absence of an agreed budget, estimates indicate that the HSC could be facing a potential deficit **in excess of £1 billion** in 2022-23.⁹ Even the draft Budget originally proposed, with its 10% baseline uplift for health, in fact represents a reduction in real term funding compared to 2021-22, meaning it would have only reduced this shortfall to around £600 million.¹⁰

The public and politicians must understand that **failure to provide sustained funding will result in substantially slower recovery and limit progress** in key areas, such as **transformation and waiting list management**. The full delivery of crucial new strategies such as the Cancer Recovery Plan and the Mental Health Strategy would also be at risk.

Members believe that our priorities, including service redesign, building our workforce capacity and investing in prevention, demonstrate the significant opportunities to ensure that current and future funding represents the best value for money. Working collectively, using evidence and engagement with the public and policy makers, we must ensure that future investment is used to drive efficiency and ultimately lead to better population health outcomes.

“The funding package agreed will shape what we can realistically deliver. We need honest conversations and must assure ourselves and the public that we are employing all the money we have as effectively as possible”

Maureen Edwards, Director of Finance, Belfast HSC Trust



3. Redesigning services – Accessing value

As has been highlighted by many reviews, the current design of our services is no longer fit for purpose; it neither offers citizens the best outcomes nor the best value for money. An honest, two-way conversation must be brokered with the public to deliberate on the changes that must take place across our health and care system. We invite politicians and the public to consider, best international practice, to secure the benefits that service redesign will bring about for our population. We call for a wider dialogue to reshape services, supporting staff to deliver the best outcomes possible, for the best value.

New Decade, New Approach commits to holding a Citizens’ Assembly on an annual basis as part of a wider programme of civic engagement.¹¹ Given the significance of the health system in our wider society, members call on elected representatives to commission a Citizens’ Assembly on this vital topic.

“During the pandemic we saw how the system can change very quickly and effectively – we must build on this learning to redesign many of our services so secure the best value and outcomes for our citizens”

Neil Guckian, Chief Executive, Western HSC Trust



4. Collaborative & Empowered Leaders

Change happens in large systems when partners and leaders at every level of our organisations are enabled to lead that change. While we have made some progress investing in collective and clinical leadership programmes and working with our partners, we need to step up this approach to create a much more enabling culture.¹²

This will involve working more effectively with communities, partners, and our staff, tapping into local knowledge and existing relationships to develop innovative solutions. We call on the public, politicians, and partners to engage in the new Integrated care planning partnerships, which provide a framework for more collaborative ways of working which can drive better outcomes.

“In the HSC, as in the NHS, we know that collaborative ways of working are delivering more. We need to embrace these new ways of working by developing both systemwide and local solutions.”

Dr Maria O’Kane, Director Medical Services, Southern HSC Trust



Supporting priorities

1. Recovery & Transformation

As the acuity of the pandemic subsides, we must prioritise the recovery of our services and address unacceptable waiting times, while seizing opportunities for transformation to more sustainable ways of working. Members agree the need to progress the 2021 Elective Care Framework, which proposed a £707.5 million investment over 5 years to close the stark gap between capacity and demand driving our waiting times.¹³ To progress, we welcome investment in specialist elective care, in multi-disciplinary teams in primary care, and further development of the suite of transformation initiatives.

Members also support consideration of a regional approach to tackling waiting lists via a series of pilot projects, which would ensure a focus on equity of access. Such a project should be data driven and entail greater communication with patients and carers.

“We have a real opportunity to redesign how we deliver Elective Care, in a way which protects the need to improve waiting lists, be more efficient, prevent harm and lead to better outcomes. The Regional Day Procedure Centre in Lagan Valley is a real example of success and should be further developed; dedicated centres such as this will improve access to treatment for all our population.”

Roisin Coulter, Chief Executive, South Eastern HSC Trust



2. Population Health Approach:

Investing in prevention and addressing inequalities

Evidence shows that fairer societies deliver better citizen health and wellbeing.¹⁴ However, one in four children in Northern Ireland are living in poverty¹⁵ and those living in the most deprived areas live in “good health” for about 15 fewer years less than those from wealthier backgrounds.¹⁶ Members therefore welcome the new Integrated Care System (ICS) planning model, which will be introduced in spring 2022. Using this model, in which the HSC will work with local partners to

plan services, we must provide more integrated care, create a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and address the unacceptable inequalities which drive poor health outcomes. Working in the context of the Programme for Government, there are significant opportunities to embrace this approach, including by investing in housing and education, addressing economic inactivity and other social determinants of health to ultimately improve outcomes.

“The pandemic has shown in sharp relief the impact of poverty and deprivation. We must use this recovery period and the move to an integrated care planning model to ensure that prevention and population health are at the heart of the HSC.”

Andrew Dougal, Chair, Public Health Agency



3. Mental Health

Members welcome the political commitment to addressing mental health in Northern Ireland, in New Decade, New Approach agreeing that this supports a more preventative approach. Colleagues welcome the move to a regional mental health service, which will provide a more focused and consistent approach across Northern Ireland, and the agreement of the new Mental Health Strategy 2021-31. In particular, adopting a multi-agency, early intervention approach, harnessing greater innovation and use of technology will be key. Members call for the strategy to be adequately funded, estimated at some £1,207m over the next 10 years.¹⁷

“We are delighted that Mental Health is receiving a much greater profile, in parity with physical health. We have engaged with many stakeholder groups to co-design our far-reaching Mental Health Strategy. We must now ensure the funding to deliver for our citizens”.

Petra Corr, Director of Mental Health, Northern HSC Trust



4. Social Care

As the pandemic has shown, social care is an integral element of how we as a society secure the health and wellbeing of citizens. We must reprioritise the social care agenda, learning from others, about how we engage communities in the mission to care for people who are vulnerable in our society. Following the comprehensive *Power to People* report, which put forward 16 proposals to reform Adult Social Care,¹⁸ the Department of Health has engaged extensively with stakeholders to develop an ambitious and innovative reform agenda for the next ten years, aligned with international best practice. Six strategic priorities are currently outlined in public consultation documents.¹⁹ We must prioritise the recommendations from this consultation and there must be urgent agreement to develop a strategy for the reform of adult social care. A strategy which provides clarity about the role and value of social care and is underpinned with adequate funding to support a sustainable social care system. This is a challenging agenda, but it must be considered a core priority.

In addition, there needs to be a much greater focus on Children's Services, ensuring all our children have the best start in life. The out workings regarding the ongoing review of Children's Services must be prioritised to address funding issues, workforce gaps and improve the design of services.

"We look forward to working with others to develop a strategy for the reform of adult social care. If we are to allow all our citizens to live well, we must invest in and value our social care workforce, and ensure sustainable funding is secured."

Patricia Higgins, Chief Executive, NI Social Care Council



5. Investment in Technology

Significant progress has been made with the use of technology in the last decade and has been much accelerated over the last two years – but there is a long way to go to realise fully the potential of data and technology as an enabler.

There must be a sustained focus on implementation of our new suite of digital strategies published in the spring by Digital Health and Care NI; electronic healthcare record, cyber security, data and innovation. Staff must be provided with the training and time to engage with this work, and we must build much better relationships with our partners to accelerate and deliver innovation.

“Delivering an economically sustainable Health and Social Care service for the next generation requires breaking the linear relationship between rising demand for services and our capacity to meet that demand. While technology and data are only one part of the jigsaw puzzle, it is the one with the highest potential. Creating impact on the bottom-line through adoption of Digital is perhaps the biggest challenge and opportunity we face as leaders.”



Karen Bailey, Chief Executive, Business Services Organisation

6. Engaged Patients, Public and Partners

The challenge ahead to recover and reshape our services is immense. In order to succeed in achieving the vision set out in *Health and Wellbeing 2026*, we will need the diversity of thought, energy, challenge and support of others to deliver the level of change necessary.

Building on the important co-production agenda and the recently developed HSC Values, we need to deepen and promote these open ways of working, investing in such things as local government input into new integrated delivery plans, patients and carers co-designing new pathways and more strategically engaging with and harnessing the expertise and support of the voluntary and community sector.

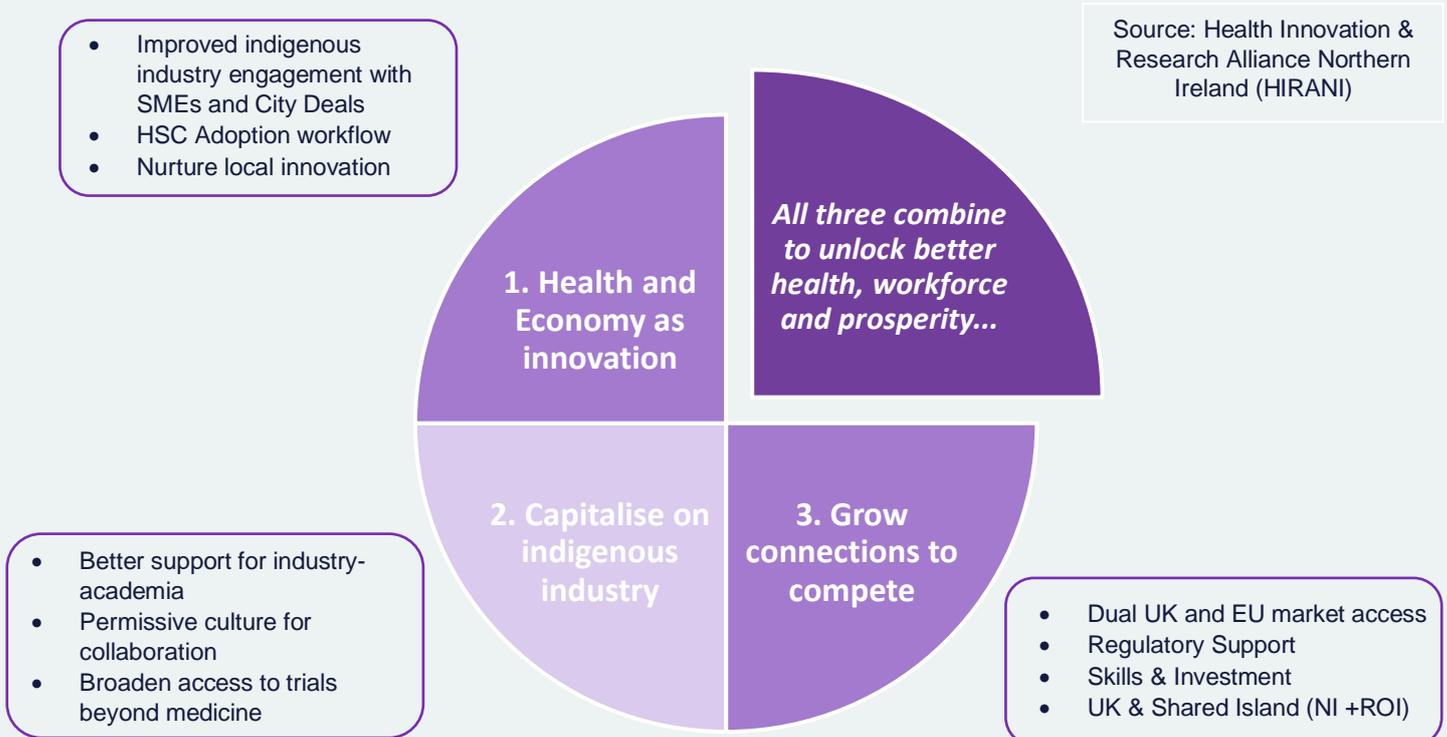
“In the Northern Trust, we have been prioritising engagement for several years now and have seen significant benefits in terms of harnessing greater energy and innovation.”

Jennifer Welsh, Chief Executive, Northern HSC Trust



7. Innovation and Economy

In the past, innovation and the economy have been perceived as bolt-on activities. However, recent evidence reiterates how investment in innovation and fostering our local economy, with HSC bodies acting as Anchor Institutions, can in fact act as a central pillar for recovery. The HSC must be supported to fully embrace this agenda, by working proactively with universities and partners in the health and life sciences sector and with communities to be a key partner in supporting Northern Ireland’s economy.



“Closer engagement between health and economy will be fundamental to deliver benefits for the citizens of Northern Ireland. It will deliver a Return on Investment for HSC and help improve patient outcomes, drive efficiency and working as a key player in local economies can help improve health and wellbeing in our communities.”

Dr Janice Bailie, Assistant Director, HSC R&D Division



8. Meeting Net Zero Carbon Commitments

Climate change is the global issue of our time, which is set to negatively impact the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our citizens in a range of ways. During the recent COP26 summit in Glasgow, Minister of Health Robin Swann committed the HSC to a net zero carbon target, contributing to the global mission to tackle climate change.²⁰

The HSC must be supported to work more proactively, both internally and with our partners to drive this agenda. To that end, the HSC should establish a small expert unit, or linking with the learning from the wider NHS, ensuring milestones can be met and that we offer leadership on this agenda internally and to our stakeholders.

“The HSC must join citizens and colleagues across government to become a key player in moving towards a low carbon economy. We must develop clear policies and programmes and work with our staff and partners to deliver this change.”

Nicole Lappin, Chair, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service



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