



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DRAFT EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

2025-2030

If you require this plan in an alternative format, please contact the Department at equality&humanrights@health-ni.gov.uk

Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across the nine equality categories outlined in the Act.

How we developed the plan

The Department of Health (the Department) develops a new Equality Action Plan (EAP) every five years to promote equality of opportunity, good relations and equity in service delivery. The action plan is developed and prioritised from the Audit of Inequalities. The Audit of Inequalities 2025-2030 can be found on the department's website [here](#). The audit gathers and analyses information across the Section 75 categories to identify inequalities that exist for those affected by the Departments' policies. The department will implement a range of actions through initiatives, interventions, programmes and strategies to address these inequalities.

The Department's Corporate Strategy and Corporate Plan

The Department will put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the equality duties are complied with and this EAP fully implemented where possible within budget constraints. The Department will ensure the effective communication of the plan to all staff and will ensure they have the necessary training and guidance on the equality duties and the implementation of the plan.

How we will monitor the plan

In accordance with the [Department's Equality scheme](#) the Department is required to submit to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) the Departmental Equality Action Plan for a period of 5 years and then subsequent [Yearly Progress Reports](#) showing how it has fulfilled its equality duties in relation to its' functions. A copy of this plan and the annual progress report to the Equality Commission will be made available on our website.

The implementation of this action plan is subject to appropriate funding being received as part of Budget 2025-26 and subsequent budget processes.

The point of contact in relation to the consultation, implementation, review and evaluation of this Equality Action Plan is the Equality and Human Rights Unit, email: [**equality&humanrights@health-ni.gov.uk**](mailto:equality&humanrights@health-ni.gov.uk)

Department of Health- Equality Action Plan 2025- 2030

Department of Health- Equality Action Plan 2025- 2030				
Impacted Section 75 Group				
	Inequality Identified	Aim and objective	Actions	Timeframe
Gender [including age]	1. High levels of self-harm for young females	Delivery of Self Harm Intervention Programme (SHIP) to provide support and reduce self-harm for young females	Implement the self-harm intervention programme and monitor delivery.	Dec-30
			Respond to self-harm registry data by developing a pilot project by 2030 for young women who have self-harmed subject to funding being confirmed.	Dec-30
	2. Lower male life expectancy with a high risk of suicide in males aged 19-55yrs in most deprived areas.	To improve on 2020-22 healthy life expectancy inequality gap of 12.2yrs for males in most and least deprived areas and on the life expectancy in NI rate of 78.4yrs for current life expectancy estimates. To continue with suicide prevention programmes to reduce number of male suicides aged 19-55yrs in most deprived areas	Delivery of the Live Better Programme launched in summer 2024 to pull together existing initiatives and programmes so they can be delivered intensively in communities to make a real and lasting difference through local delivery plans. Activities will focus on three core outcomes – Starting Well, Living Well, and Ageing Well until 2030.	Dec-30
Delivery of programmes within the Protect life 2 Strategy actions with a focus on men particularly in deprived areas where suicide rates are highest.			Dec-27	
Gender	3. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic and sexual abuse.	To reduce the numbers of women and girls affected by domestic and sexual abuse and to provide tailored, responsive and specialised support and provision to those impacted by domestic and sexual abuse.	Implementation of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031 through delivery of actions outlined in the initial 3-year action plan and any subsequent action plans.	Dec-31
			Ensure alignment with the Executive Office's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2024-2031 to ensure there is a comprehensive and joined up response to Violence Against Women and Girls.	Dec-31

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Impacted Section 75 Group		4. Women face additional barriers in accessing proper healthcare.	To review and improve healthcare services for women.	Develop and publish a three year Women’s Health Action Plan in 2025 which will highlight the wide range of policy and service development initiatives currently in progress, and outline the actions and improvements that can be delivered over the next three years to improve health outcomes for women.	Dec-25
		5. Poorer physical and mental health of males in the criminal justice system	To improve the physical and mental health of males in the criminal justice system	To ensure reducing health inequalities remains a key priority withing the Improving Health within Criminal Justice Strategy and Action Plan: this includes the refresh of the current Strategy or the development of prison focused plans during 2025-26.	Dec-26
		6. A larger proportion of males than females abuse substances including alcohol, tobacco and drugs	Focusing on preventing, addressing and reducing the harm related to alcohol, tobacco and drug misuse including ongoing population level reductions in harmful use of these substances.	Progress with proposals to introduce legislation to enact Minimum Unit Pricing of alcohol in Northern Ireland. Awaiting Executive discussion and approval by 2027.	Dec-27
				Implementing the Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery – A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use 2021-2031 strategy.	Dec-31
				Progress to introduce UK-wide Tobacco and Vapes Bill (with the consent of the NI Executive).	Aug-25
	Sexual Orientation	7. LGBTQIA+ community are at a higher risk of unequal treatment from healthcare	Improved access to mental health promotion messages and early intervention supports for the LGBTQIA+ community	Identify current provision for at risk groups in terms of mental health promotion and early intervention and identify opportunities for improvement.	ongoing

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Impacted Section 75 Group		staff, directly impacting their mental health and therefore experience barriers in access to mental health services.		Refresh the Mental Health Strategy Early Intervention and Prevention action plan to develop clear actions which focus on at risk groups including the LGBTQIA+ community.	Dec-25
		8. Gay, Bi-sexual and Men who have Sex with Men are at a higher risk of sexual ill health	To educate men who are higher risk of sexual ill health and deliver on the objectives of the sexual health plan e.g. to reduce transmission of Sexually Transmitted Infections.	The DoH Sexual Health Plan 2023-2026 working with the Public Health agency and other stakeholders aims to improve sexual health for the population. There are 7 objectives in the sexual health action plan including reducing the incidence of sexually transmitted infections and strive to eliminate new HIV transmissions.	Dec-26
	Age	9. There are increasing rates of obesity in young children in the most deprived areas.	To reduce the increasing rates of obesity in young children with poorer health outcomes, currently 26% of children in the 2023 NI health Survey are living with obesity or are overweight.	Development of a new Obesity Strategic Framework – Healthy Futures which aims to create the conditions that enable and support people to improve their diet and participate in more physical activity and reduce the risk of related harm. The public consultation was completed in 2024 and further consideration is ongoing in 2025.	On going
	10. Lower attendance of women (aged 25-29) for cervical cancer screening.	Increase the coverage of cervical screening for the eligible population in line with the national standard.	In collaboration with Public Health Agency to increase the coverage of eligible women recorded as having cervical screening. Using a range of social media and other engagement to encourage screening and to also consider promotion across all section 75 groups, as appropriate is ongoing.	On going	
	11. Those between the age of 50 and 60 have a higher risk of undiagnosed bowel cancer.	Extend the age range of bowel cancer screening in line with the Cancer Strategy 2022-2032.	In collaboration with Public Health Agency to extend the age range from the current eligible population of 60-74 years olds to 50-74 years old, in line with the Cancer Strategy 2022-32 and the rest of the UK.	Dec 32	

Impacted Section 75 Group	12. Delays in hospital discharge for older patients requiring home care	Increase the range of services to support an individual in their own home to decrease number of days in hospital when ready for discharge.	<p>Since September 2022, measures have been in place for hospital discharge where a homecare package cannot be provided on a timely basis. In such circumstances, individuals should be offered a place in appropriate residential or nursing accommodation on a temporary basis if their needs cannot be met safely at home without some form of support.</p> <p>The Department has introduced a Social Care Collaborative Forum, and one of the aims of the Forum has been to bring together, Trusts, Independent Sector, Service users and carers to improve access to homecare packages. Initiatives include the introduction of Early Review teams in each Trust.</p> <p>Continue with the Early Review Team showing positive results as early intervention and completion of a functional assessment of the individual enables their package of care to be adjusted to suit their current need.</p> <p>Longer term work of the Forum includes looking at digital solutions to make sure that homecare capacity is used as efficiently as possible, and that our model of how homecare is provided is fit for the future.</p>	Dec 30
	13. Reduced access to health care to address increasing children/ young people mental health needs including children	To reduce the waiting times statistics for The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who deliver mental health services to children and young people with mental	The Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031. The Strategy sets out 35 actions under three overarching themes: Theme 1 - promoting mental wellbeing, resilience and good mental health across society; Theme 2 – providing the right support at the right time; and Theme 3 – new ways of working.	Dec 31

Impacted Section 75 Group	in care/looked after children.	health concerns up to the age of 18.		
		Improve mental health among children and young people using key indicators from the 2020 Youth Wellbeing Child and Adolescent Prevalence Study.	Actions 10 and 12 have been commenced. Action 10 provides a commitment to increase funding for CAMHS to 10% of adult mental health funding and improve the delivery of the stepped care model to ensure it meets the needs of young people, their families and their support networks. Action 12 is to create clear and regionally consistent urgent, emergency and crisis services for children and young people that will work together with crisis services for adult mental health through the Mental Health Strategy lifetime to 2031.	Dec 31
		To improve the wellbeing of looked after children in partnership with Department for Education.	Implementation of A Life Deserved- Caring for children and young people in Northern Ireland strategy published in 2021. The Life Deserved Strategy doesn't have a specific timeframe and will remain extant until it is replaced. Implementation has been slower than anticipated for several reasons – the lasting impact of Covid, a desire to await the outcome of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services and the financial pressures currently being experienced – so while there has been some progress, many of the commitments remain ongoing. Some of these are being progressed as part of the overarching Children's Social Care Services Strategic Reform Programme. This includes, for example, a review of residential care which will be considering the need for homes which accommodate those of particular age groups (including younger children). Work is also ongoing to consider actions to address homelessness among care leavers aged 16 to 25, in line with the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to embed permanent systems change to prevent	Dec 31

Impacted Section 75 Group			homelessness among young people coming out of care.	
	14. Lower registration rates and therefore lower access to NHS dental services for children aged 0-4.	Improved oral health for children aged 0-4yrs by 2030.	<p>Continuation of the dental health surveys for children in Northern Ireland, at agreed intervals, to monitor and identify need.</p> <p>Consideration given to the re-launch and expansion of Happy Smiles Programme. Launched in October 2016, this evidence-based programme aims to improve the oral health of children in nursery school education. The programme aims to encourage regular brushing with a fluoride toothpaste, healthy eating and registration with a general dental practitioner. At present funding for these programmes is targeted at the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Extension of the time-limited enhanced child examination fee for general dental services in Northern Ireland (currently runs to 31 March 2025).</p> <p>The General Dental Services reform will consider the incentives for practitioners to facilitate early attendance and registration.</p> <p>Increase access to General Dental Services and improve attendance for children aged 0-4 by 2030 and increase registration rates from 36.7% of 0-4 year olds registered 1st June 2024 to 65% of 0-4 year olds registered by 2030.</p>	Dec 30

Impacted Section 75 Group	Persons with disabilities and person not	15. Service Users face delays in assessment, diagnosis and intervention for autism.	The Autism strategy 2023-2028 sets out five key commitments to respond to the challenges that we were told throughout consultation and engagement on the Strategy needed to be addressed.	Progress with the cross-departmental Autism Strategy 2023-2028 and implementation of the strategy delivery plan to improve assessment, diagnosis and intervention for service users.	Dec 28
				Consultation on a Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework. The Framework, when finalised, will support health and social care services and practitioners to collaborate with other services, agencies and key stakeholders in order to rationalise, coordinate and integrate high-quality, evidence-based support, intervention and diagnostic care pathways that best meet the needs of children, young people and their families. The Framework will support the development of broad neurodevelopmental assessment, diagnosis, and support pathways, <i>including</i> for Autism and ADHD with an aim the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework Consultation will commence no later than 30th June 2025.	
				An annual progress report on the implementation of the Autism Strategy 2023 to 2028 will be produced and published on the Department of Health website.	Dec 28
		16. A number of barriers are stopping people with a learning disability and sensory impairments	To improve access and outcomes for those with disabilities across DoH policies and strategies.	Implementation of the recommendations set out in the Learning Disability Nursing Review Equity of Access and Outcome Implementation of the Framework for Children with Disability and finalisation of adult learning disability service model ahead with public consultation.	Dec 30

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Impacted Section 75 Group		from getting good quality healthcare	Provide support to help address and manage patients' conditions, how to navigate a range of services, and learn about the different health and social care professionals they will meet along their journey	Embedding of the two new guides launched June 2024 known as care pathways to support adults with sensory disabilities in Northern Ireland. One for services and support for people who are deaf or have hearing loss and the other for services and support for sight loss.	Dec 25
	Persons with dependents	17. Difficulty accessing specialist services for diagnosis, treatment and drugs for rare diseases.	Implementation of the Northern Ireland Rare Diseases Action Plan 2021-2026 to improve the lives of people living with a rare condition in Northern Ireland: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping patients get a final diagnosis faster; • increasing awareness of rare diseases among healthcare professionals; • better coordination of care; • improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. 	Improving provision for children with disabilities plans involve increasing short breaks capacity and expanding family, therapeutic and behavioural supports in the community by 2030.	Dec 30
				The Northern Ireland Rare Diseases Action is a 5 year plan, published in 2021. The 14 high level actions are being taken forward by the NI Rare Diseases Implementation Group (NIRDIG) and yearly Progress Reports are published on the DoH website.	Dec 26
				The Action Plan and Progress Reports can be found here: Northern Ireland Rare Diseases - Action Plan 2022-23 and reports Department of Health . Implementation is ongoing and subject to funding.	On going
	18. Carers suffer from higher levels of ill health including increased stress and mental health issues and	Recognising, supporting, valuing and to get better levels of health for carers.	Mental Health strategy 2021-2031. Department has established the Social Care Collaborative Forum (SCCF). A Supporting Carers Workstream, co-chaired by Carers (NI) and Department of Health, has been established with a workplan focused on Carers specific issues inclusive of both adult and young carers.	ongoing	

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Impacted Section 75 Group		increased social isolation.		Evaluation of the current Caring for Carers Strategy 2006	ongoing
				The Cross Departmental Senior Officials Group has been formed. This will provide a conduit for the views and experiences of carers.	ongoing
	Racial Groups	19. Patients including refugees and asylum seekers and other newcomers may experience barriers to accessing health and social care services and often have poorer health outcomes .	To support people to overcome the barriers to accessing health services through the provision of appropriate resources, training and navigational aids that are accessible and culturally competent	Providing funding for Social Inclusion Workers to April 2026 in each Health and Social Care Trust area to support People Seeking International Protection (PSIP) to access and navigate the Health and Social Care (HSC) System.	Apr 26
				Providing an online resource for people who are not proficient in English to enable them to understand the HSC System.	ongoing
				Coordination of the provision of standardised services for People Seeking International Protection (PSIP) across the region and provide funding for those services.	ongoing
		20. Difficulty accessing emotional and mental health support for minority ethnic groups.	Improved access to mental health promotion messages and early intervention supports for minority ethnic groups	Identify current provision for at risk groups in terms of mental health promotion and early intervention and identify opportunities for improvement Refresh the Mental Health Strategy Early Intervention and Prevention action plan to develop clear actions which focus on at risk groups including ethnic minority groups	ongoing
		21. There are high suicide rates particularly among male Irish Travellers.	To provide support to Irish Traveller groups to prevent suicide	Provision of suicide prevention and emotional health and wellbeing support for Irish Traveller community ongoing until 2030. Currently there are elements of work taking place on a cross-border basis e.g. Donegal Traveller Group delivers cultural awareness training in the WHSCT	Dec-30

				area. Further consultations on potential opportunities for this area of work are planned in the future.	
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