

Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Health NI

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Rural Needs Assessment is being carried out as part of a public consultation on the proposals set out in - Hospitals – Creating a Network for better outcomes.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Hospitals – Creating a Network for better outcomes.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The aim of the policy is to consider how applying a Hospital Network approach could be applied in Northern Ireland to create better outcomes for citizens.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The proposed health and social care reconfiguration in Northern Ireland present both opportunities and challenges for rural populations. A key concern is access to healthcare services. While the proposals aim to provide acute care locally, many rural individuals may face increased travel distances for specialised non-emergency treatments, especially given the limited transportation options in these areas. It is crucial that the hospital framework includes provisions for reviewing and enhancing travel support to ensure accessibility for rural residents.

The proposals aim to reduce health inequalities by creating more access to services for the whole population, the document recognises that the consolidation of services may have an impact for rural dwellers. Engaging with rural communities is identified as essential in decision-making processes, to develop a tailored healthcare services that meet local needs. The framework also addresses workforce challenges, emphasising the importance of recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals in rural areas, where staffing can be difficult. Furthermore, the potential for digital and remote healthcare solutions offers promise, but effective implementation will rely on adequate infrastructure and connectivity.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The policy is likely to impact rural residents differently than urban dwellers due to the inherent challenges of travel and access to healthcare services. While urban residents may face increased travel demands for specialised non-emergency services, rural residents are already accustomed to longer journeys for care. Both groups may have issues, such as time constraints and travel costs, but it is more likely that urban dwellers do not have access to a private vehicle [1]. The policy acknowledges these issues and commits to reviewing travel support for those in rural areas, highlighting the need for equitable access (Section 3, Challenges).

The plan aims to establish more specialised services closer to home for rural populations, alleviating some of the travel burden. It also addresses workforce shortages and the integration of digital health solutions, which are essential for enhancing healthcare delivery in both settings (Change Enablers). Ultimately, the policy seeks to improve healthcare equity and ensure that all residents can access timely, high-quality care.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

To identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas, various methods and information sources have been utilised, this includes ongoing stakeholder dialogue through involvement and co-production approaches, a number of the sources are listed below:

- **NISRA.** (2021). Population Projections: Data on demographic changes affecting health service demand. Retrieved from [NISRA](#)
- **Ark.** (2022). Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: Insights into transport access and vehicle ownership. Retrieved from [NILT](#)
- **Health NI.** (2021). Review of Urgent and Emergency Care: Engagement findings reflecting community preferences for service delivery. Retrieved from [Health NI](#)
- **Health NI.** (2021). Northern Ireland Cancer Strategy. Retrieved from [Health NI](#)
- **Becher, H., et al.** (2020). Health inequalities in rural areas. Retrieved from [NCBI](#)
- **Nally, B., et al.** (2019). Socioeconomic factors affecting health in rural communities. Retrieved from [NCBI](#)
- **Clinical Service Delivery Networks:** Overview of existing networks across HSC Trusts. Retrieved from [HSC Trusts](#)
- **Scottish Health Protection Network:** Established to coordinate health protection services, providing applicable insights. Retrieved from [Scottish Health Protection Network](#)
- **Royal College of Surgeons Reports:** Recommendations for standards in rural surgery based on Scottish experiences. Retrieved from [Royal College of Surgeons](#)

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

We have identified several critical social and economic needs for rural communities:

- **Access to Healthcare:** Limited healthcare facilities lead to longer travel times for essential services, impacting health outcomes. The **Review of Urgent and Emergency Care** emphasizes the need for improved service models tailored for rural areas (Health NI, 2021).
- **Transport Challenges:** Approximately 20% of rural residents struggle with inadequate public transport, hindering their ability to access services and employment opportunities (NILT, 2022).
- **Economic Disparities:** Rural areas often experience lower income levels and reduced employment opportunities compared to urban settings, necessitating targeted economic policies (NISRA, 2021).
- **Aging Population:** The demographic shift towards an older population increases the demand for tailored healthcare services (Becher et al., 2020; Nally et al., 2019).

Addressing these needs is vital for enhancing the quality of life in rural Northern Ireland.

If the response to Section 3A was **YES GO TO Section 4A.**

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

In the development of policies addressing the social and economic needs of people in rural areas of Northern Ireland, several critical issues are being considered:

- **Access to Healthcare:** The limitations of healthcare facilities and the resulting longer travel times for essential services are being recognised as barriers to health outcomes. Policymakers are emphasising the need for improved service models that cater specifically to rural populations.
- **Transport Challenges:** The inadequacy of public transport is a key concern, with approximately 20% of rural residents facing difficulties that hinder their access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. This issue is prompting a re-evaluation of transport policies to enhance connectivity for rural communities.
- **Economic Disparities:** The lower income levels and reduced employment opportunities in rural areas are prompting the need for targeted economic policies aimed at bridging the gap between urban and rural economies.
- **Aging Population:** The increasing ageing demographic in rural areas is leading to heightened demand for specialised healthcare services, necessitating policies that address the unique needs of older residents.
- **Community Engagement:** The importance of effective Clinical Service Delivery Networks is being recognised, with a focus on fostering collaborative approaches across Health and Social Care Trusts to better address the needs of rural populations.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes No If the response is **NO GO TO Section 5C.**

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The issues identified for rural dwellers have been integrated into the policy development and have influenced how the document has been written. Further consideration will be given to people living in rural areas during the public consultation and any subsequent outworkings of the policy (dependent on outcome of consultation).

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES GO TO Section 6A.**

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

N/A

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Roisin Kelly
Position/Grade:	Co-production and consultation consultant
Division/Branch	Regional Health Services Transformation Directorate
Signature:	Roisin Kelly
Date:	01 October 2024
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Michelle Estler
Position/Grade:	Principal, Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Transformation Branch
Signature:	Michelle Estler
Date:	1 October 2024