

Our Impact

REPORT 2023/2024



Chest
Heart &
Stroke



Welcome

from **Declan Cunnane CEO**

I am delighted to share with you our 2023/24 Annual Impact Report. This has been another hugely successful year for our charity, and I would like to share some of the key highlights with you.

This year 34,587 people and organisations benefitted from our Care and Health Promotion services. A standout success has been our school programmes. We are the only local charity dedicated to the prevention of chest, heart and stroke illnesses and supporting young people's health and wellbeing is crucial to this mission. Learning early on how to enjoy healthy, active lives is key to giving children the best start in life. It helps them grow into adults who are less at risk of serious illnesses like chest, heart and stroke conditions, as well as obesity. In 2023/24, an incredible 18,168 pupils, parents and teachers took part in our school programmes, gaining access to information and advice on how to eat well, stay active and understand the risk factors for serious illness.

We were also delighted to install NICHHS Walls of Hope in the stroke units of Craigavon Area Hospital, Lurgan Hospital, Royal Victoria Hospital, Antrim Area Hospital, Altnagelvin Hospital, Whiteabbey Hospital, Causeway Hospital, and the Ulster Hospital this year. Our Walls of Hope clearly outline the stroke services we offer to families and provide them with our leaflets and information booklets. This ensures that hospital patients and their families have timely access to support information, helping them to make informed choices about their rehabilitation journey and understand the additional help available from our charity after they are discharged.

In autumn 2023 we launched our vaping campaign in response to misunderstandings about the potential health risks associated with vaping and the alarming rise in the number of young people using vapes. The campaign included extensive outdoor, digital and radio advertising. Mary Griffin and her daughter Sarah supported us by sharing their life-threatening experience of vaping, after Sarah was admitted to ICU and placed in an induced coma after using vapes. The vaping campaign was the most successful awareness campaign ever run by NICHHS, with a global reach that resulted in coverage across local, national, and international newspapers, news websites, TV, and radio. As a result, we won the Excellence in Marketing category at the 2024 Belfast Telegraph Business Awards, and we were delighted that the impact and success of the campaign was recognised by the judges.

2023/24 has indeed been a winning year for NICHHS. Our Director of Public Health, Fidelma Carter, won the Leading Collaboration and Partnership award at the 2024 CO3 Leadership Awards and our Communications team were runners up in the Best Use Of Social Media in Charity category at the 2023 Northern Ireland Social Media Awards. Winning these awards is an outstanding achievement and a testament to our staff's hard work and dedication.

I am also delighted to highlight the success of our flagship Red Dress Fun Run event held at Stormont Estate in February. The support of hundreds of participants raised an incredible £72,000 for our work. Thank you to everyone who took part in this event and contributed to our cause.

Today, there are as many as 470,000 adults and children in Northern Ireland living with a chest, heart or stroke condition. As a charity, almost 90% of our income comes from public donations and we are extremely grateful to our fundraisers, supporters, volunteers, followers, and friends who make our work possible. Without your support we would be unable to make such a positive impact on the lives of thousands of people in Northern Ireland. On behalf of our clients and staff, I sincerely thank you.

Declan Cunnane, CEO

Front Cover Picture – Dr Claire Tonry and Dr Chris Watson whose research project looking at the development of a lateral flow device to test for heart failure received funding from NICHHS.

What we do

We have been leading the fight against chest, heart and stroke illnesses in Northern Ireland since 1946.

We do this by working across four main areas:

- We Care
- We Prevent
- We Research
- We Campaign

We provide expert **care** and support to anyone living with chest, heart and stroke conditions.

We work to **prevent** these illnesses, by helping detect early signs of chest, heart and stroke illness and empowering individuals to make healthy choices.

We fund **research** to advance how we treat, care for and prevent chest, heart and stroke conditions.

We **campaign** for better care, treatments and awareness of chest, heart and stroke conditions.

As a charity, almost 90% of our income comes from public donations.



Our Mission

Prevent chest, heart and stroke conditions and support people affected.

Our Vision

A healthy Northern Ireland free from chest, heart and stroke illnesses.



£4,713,140

expenditure on charitable activities.

(based on unaudited accounts for the year ended 31/03/24)



34,587

people and organisations across Northern Ireland benefitted from our Care and Health Promotion Services.

We Care

HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES / EMOTIONAL SUPPORT / FAMILY SUPPORT / PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMMES / INFORMATION & ADVICE

At Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke, we offer a wide range of care and support services for people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions. We work with people throughout Northern Ireland, along with their families and carers.

Through our Care Services team, we provide:

- Practical advice and information
- Emotional support
- Access to physical activity to support rehabilitation
- A range of programmes for improving overall wellbeing
- Referrals and signposting to other organisations

Family Support Service

Our Family Support Service is here to support both you and your family as you navigate life with a chest, heart or stroke condition. You will receive an initial home visit through which we can offer practical and emotional support and find out more about your individual circumstances. From there, we can provide you with personalised advice and a support plan to suit your needs.

Support for Stroke

Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP)

PREP is a physiotherapy led, community-based course which helps rebuild people's lives and confidence after stroke through exercise and education. It is designed for stroke survivors who have completed the statutory rehabilitation provided by the NHS to meet their longer-term care needs. Our six-week PREP programme is available across all of Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Trusts.



PREP covers the following topics:

- What is a stroke?
- Emotions after a stroke
- A healthier you
- Lifestyle choices
- Fatigue and falls prevention
- Signposting

Wellness Sessions

Our information and wellness sessions delivered across NI focus on secondary prevention, health promotion, physical activity and emotional wellbeing. They offer peer support and reduce social isolation.

Young Stroke Support

With 25% of stroke survivors in Northern Ireland under 65 years of age, our Young Stroke Support service provides much needed peer support to younger survivors of this condition. This service offer provides a chance to connect with other people of a similar age, who are living with stroke. Through this service you will also receive health promotion, physical activity and emotional wellbeing support.



Support for Chest Conditions

If you're living with a respiratory condition, we are here to help you with whatever challenges you may be facing. Whether it's providing information and advice on your condition to relieve worry and confusion or helping you to connect with others in similar situations, we're here to help you get back on your feet.

Breathing Better Education Programme

An education programme for anyone with a long-term chest condition which covers the following topics:

- Respiratory conditions
- Medications and knowing your numbers
- Breathing better and physical activity
- Adopting healthy habits
- Sleep, fatigue and emotions
- Moving forward well

Wellness Sessions

Our face-to-face Breathing Better Wellness Sessions focus on health promotion, physical exercise and emotional wellbeing. They offer peer support and reduce social isolation.

Inspire Choir

Our dedicated Inspire Choir is open to all service users, but is primarily targeted at those with chest conditions as singing helps to significantly improve breathing and general lung function.



Support for Heart Conditions

Whether you've been diagnosed with a heart condition, or have experienced a heart attack and are now recovering, we are here to help with all aspects of your recovery.

Heart Strong Education Programme

Delivered over six consecutive weeks, this education and peer support programme is offered to those across Northern Ireland, who have had a diagnosis of a heart condition. This programme is designed to help participants to learn more about their health and take the positive steps needed to move forward post diagnosis.

The programme covers the following topics:

- Heart conditions and knowing your numbers
- Emotions after a cardiac diagnosis
- Healthy eating and adopting healthy habits
- Physical activity
- Sleep and managing fatigue
- Moving forward

Support for All

Taking Control Self Management Programme

If you're living with a long-term chest, heart or stroke condition, then our Taking Control Self Management Programme provides a range of skills which will help you to manage your condition better and improve your confidence. It also connects you to people with similar conditions, who understand what it's like to live with a long-term condition.

The programme covers the following topics:

- Getting a good night's sleep
- Managing symptoms
- Medication 'how-to'
- Working with your healthcare team
- Setting weekly goals
- Effective problem-solving
- Better communication
- Handling difficult emotions
- How to relax
- Tips for eating well



From The Heart

If you're living with a chest, heart or stroke condition, our 'From The Heart' magazine provides postal support to help you feel more connected to our charity and others in a similar situation to you, and to look after your wellbeing at home.

Support for Carers

At NICHHS we recognise that caring for a loved one can be a rewarding yet challenging responsibility. Life changes significantly for you, as well as for your family member. Not only are you adapting to life in the role as carer and the changes in the person you care for, you also have your own mental and physical health to consider.

Carers play a vital role in providing support and assistance to those who are unable to care for themselves due to illness or disability. Our carers support programmes offer a range of services,

including our Family Support Service, which are tailored to meet the unique needs of individuals providing care to someone with a chest, heart or stroke condition.

We continue to work in partnership with our Health & Social Care Trusts and relevant organisations and voluntary organisations to support our service users.

To find out more about our services, visit www.nichs.org.uk/support. You can make a referral at www.nichs.org.uk/referral



Nicola's Story – Stroke Survivor

Nicola Shaw, from Ballygowan, had a stroke at just 44 years old and her story highlights how stroke can happen to anyone, at any age.

Nicola recalls; "I had my stroke on Friday 16th December 2022. It was just another ordinary day, and I could never have imagined it would end with me having a stroke."

"I was at spin class the night I had my stroke. I had what I would describe as an out of body experience. It was as if I was looking down on myself and I was asking, 'who is that with the floppy right arm?'. I also had right-sided numbness, pins and needles and my tongue felt like it was really badly swollen."

"After a while it felt like whatever had happened had resolved itself. I started to drive home and was on a phone call when I became very aware I couldn't speak properly. I got home and explained what had happened to my husband, Darren, and we rang my mum to come and look after our two young sons so we could go to hospital. All was fine at that stage. I was still worried, but the functionality had come back in my arm. We set off for the Ulster Hospital and as Darren was driving, the symptoms I had

experienced earlier came back but this time my right leg was also affected, and it felt really heavy which was frightening."



At the hospital, Nicola was told that because of her symptoms, a stroke needed to be ruled out and she was taken straight for a CT scan.

Nicola explains; "The first CT scan was clear so they repeated it with dye but that was clear too. By now my speech was back to normal but my right arm was still useless. The doctors therefore decided to treat me as if I had had a stroke, so I was given the clot busting drug Thrombolysis and was admitted to the stroke ward. It was all quite shocking."

"I had repeat CT scans over that weekend and they continued to be clear. MRI scans are only performed on weekdays, so it wasn't until the Monday that it was confirmed I had suffered an ischaemic stroke which had been caused by a clot. To be told I had had a stroke in my early forties with no previous warning signs was quite unbelievable."

Nicola continues; **"I was in hospital for five nights and when I was discharged, I received no signposting, no follow up appointments, nothing. The message seemed to be 'you have had a stroke but you're not too bad so on you go'."**

Nicola contacted her GP surgery but unfortunately received no immediate support there either. "When I rang my surgery, I was told that because it was so close to Christmas, they weren't taking appointments. It felt scary and isolating."

Back at home Nicola started her recovery journey but the impact of the stroke was life-changing. "I was a really active person before the stroke and then suddenly I was at home, not able to do very much. I was really fatigued. The post stroke fatigue was like a brain fog for me, particularly around word association. It was like my brain had gone- it was a black, dense nothingness."

"I was also quite affected sensory processing wise, and it was really hard with two young boys and the noise that comes with them. I was signed off work to recover and at first, I was lucky if I could do just one thing a day, like have a friend visit for an hour."

With no support forthcoming from statutory services Nicola started looking for alternative organisations who could help and came across Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke.

"I contacted NICHS and Dawn was assigned as my Care Services Coordinator. The first step with NICHS is their Family Support service and Dawn phoned me, so she could talk to me and understand my particular set of circumstances and offer the support that would be best suited to me."

"Dawn was a listening ear which was great, but she also signposted me to practical support offered by NICHS such as their Return to Work Programme, as well as putting me in touch with a fellow charity to avail of their befriender service and stroke counselling service. It was such a big help to have Dawn coordinate all this, particularly in the early days after a stroke when everything is so tiring."

"Later on in my journey I decided I wanted to give something back for the support I had received so I decided to fundraise for NICHS and raised £1,069. It was important to me that the stroke had purpose and for me to make a difference because of it."

Nicola explains; "People's misconceptions about stroke are something I have become really aware of since my stroke. I always get people saying, 'you are too young' or 'you don't look like you have had a stroke'. For me it has been useful to be able to raise awareness and highlight to people that you can have a stroke at any age and stage in life."

Nicola had surgery to fix the cause of her stroke – a hole in her heart. "It was discovered I had Patent Foramen Ovale. This is often the cause of strokes in younger people."

"I had closure surgery on December 21st 2023, almost a year to the day of having my stroke. I had a 25-millimetre device implanted in my heart which closes the hole that allowed the clot which caused my stroke to travel. I now know I'm not at risk of a further ischaemic stroke which is comforting."

Thankfully, Nicola recovered well from her surgery and is looking to the future. "I have so much more energy, I'm back training and I got back into employment working as a Senior HR Consultant."

"I don't necessarily feel lucky that I had a stroke, but in a way I'm really lucky in terms of my recovery from the stroke. I know other people don't recover so well."



Nicola concludes; **"Life after stroke is different but that doesn't mean it's worse. Yes, I've been through some really tough times but I'm still here. I've got my kids, my husband, my family, and my friends. I just try to find the positives."**

Care Impact 23/24

Over the past year, we've helped over 3,000 people and their families to adjust to life with a chest, heart or stroke condition, helping them to enjoy life to the full, re-engage with hobbies, and improve their confidence, independence and overall quality of life.



3,327
people supported across
our Care Services

Cardiac Support

396

Respiratory Support

659

Stroke Support

1,078

Number of people supported by each of our services:

Family Support	1882	Taking Control Self-Management Programme	198
PREP	522	Carers' Education Programme	89
Breathing Better	76	Return to Work Programme	17
Inspire Choir	75	Heart Strong	18
Stroke Wellness Sessions	482	Respiratory Wellness Sessions	149

Family Support

1,882

people
supported

1,386

home
visits

5,144

support
calls

908

information
packs provided

1,064

external referrals
/signposting

Those who received Family Support said...

96%

felt listened to
and supported

96%

were confident
managing their
condition

96%

felt confident
accessing support

83%

felt less
isolated

Stroke Support



1,078

people were referred to
our stroke services

PREP (Post Rehab Exercise Programme)



700

people were
referred



522

took
part

People who took part in PREP showed improvements in
mobility, balance/risk of falling, and their mental wellbeing.
After one full PREP cycle:

76%

showed an
improvement
in functional
mobility.

88%

showed an
improvement
in balance
and mobility.

77%

improved
their walking
speed.

80%

reported an
improvement
in wellbeing.



The number of
people at risk of falls
decreased by **35%**.



The number of people with
probable clinical depression
dropped by two thirds.



More people were
community walkers
by the end of PREP.

Respiratory Support



659 people were referred to our respiratory services

149 took part in our Respiratory Wellness Sessions and 76 completed our Breathing Better Education Programme

Breathing Better Education Programme

People felt more confident managing their condition and making lifestyle changes after taking part in our Breathing Better Education Programme:

100%

were more confident managing their condition

91%

reported being more active

83%

had taken steps to change their lifestyle

100%

felt more in control of their general health

Taking Control Self-Management Programme



227

people were referred to Taking Control



198

took part

The programme was rated 4.7 out of 5 stars

95% would definitely recommend the programme to others

96% said that the programme helped them feel more confident managing their condition.

Those who took part reported an increase in confidence managing:

72%

emotional distress

72%

fatigue

69%

other symptoms

76%

pain

We Campaign

CHEST, HEART AND STROKE SERVICES REFORM / SMOKING AND VAPING / OBESITY / HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

We campaign and lobby local representatives and Government to introduce health policies and changes in legislation that will lead to improvements in the care and treatment of chest, heart and stroke illnesses, and in the health and wellbeing of the population of Northern Ireland.

We always listen to views of people living with chest, heart, and stroke conditions, and to their

loved ones. Your experiences help shape our campaigns for better care and prevention of these conditions, today and tomorrow.

We continued to lobby local representatives and Government both during the period when we had no Executive and when the Executive and Assembly returned to full operation. We continued to lead the fight against chest, heart and stroke conditions in any way we can – through working with All Party Groups, the Trusts and other community organisations to influence change.

Policy and Public Affairs Key Highlights 23/24



We launched our respiratory and cardiac manifestos, both of which we sought the views of patients and carers on.



We have increased engagement with Assembly Members and others on respiratory issues including pressing for a Clean Air Strategy as part of the Healthy Air Northern Ireland coalition.



We campaigned in support of the Tobacco and Vaping Bill and are continuing to press the Assembly to introduce a Vaping Register, for retailers who wish to sell vapes.



Via the All-Party Stroke Group, we highlighted the importance of prevention and pressed the Minister for Health on the failure to drive forward with the Stroke Action Plan.



We have engaged with the Department of Health about the involvement of patients in the Board working on stroke service reform.



As part of the Community Rehabilitation Alliance NI, we are pressing for the 'right to rehabilitation' to be part of the new Executive's Programme for Government.





Oran's Story – Stroke Survivor

Oran McBride, from Derry, had a severe, unexpected stroke 3 years ago at just 53 years old. Oran went from exercising 6 days a week to having to learn how to walk and talk again. But he didn't give up on life.

Oran recalls, "One morning I felt something like a spasm in my right calf. It felt like it was jumping by itself, and it just didn't seem right to me because I trained 6 days a week and was super fit, but it was like nothing I had felt before."

"I sat down for about 10 minutes but when I got up the spasm started again. I just knew something was wrong. I have a good friend who is a retired GP, so I phoned him, and he advised I go to the hospital to get it checked out. I went to Altnagelvin Hospital and had a CT scan. The results didn't show anything up, but the doctors said they were going to keep me in for monitoring and at that stage I thought I might get home the next day. When I woke up the next morning and tried to move however, my movement on the right side of my body had gone. There was nothing, absolutely no movement- it was terrifying."

Oran continues; "This was at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, so nobody was allowed into the ward to be with me. I was on my own and I didn't know what was happening. I was later sent for an MRI scan, but the results didn't come back for hours. I was alone all that time, and the mental impact was awful."

"The doctors eventually explained I had had a complete blockage to my brain. They also said my blood pressure levels were at a critically high level which I was completely unaware of. I was given medication and they got my blood pressure under control as much as possible but by that stage it was too late for me to have the clot busting drug, Thrombolysis, and unfortunately, I just had to let nature take its course."

"Although my brain was injured, I can remember everything that went on during that time in hospital, but I could not communicate. Simple questions and instructions, like 'how many fingers am I holding up?', 'touch your nose' - I couldn't answer or do any of them. I was telling myself, 'come on, do what the doctor is telling you', but I just couldn't, my body wouldn't respond. It was really difficult, but I was then able to see my wife and we discussed things and I said, 'you know

what, I have a family, I have you, I need to keep going for everybody'. However, the not knowing what happened or why it happened was very hard. I thought I was the last person who would have a stroke- I only took a very odd drink, I never smoked, I ate well, slept well, I was physically very fit. There were a lot of questions going through my mind as to why this had happened."

Oran started rehab within a few days of being admitted to hospital which was very important to him. He explains; "I wasn't sure I'd be able to do anything, but I had the mentality that I wanted to get up and start rehab straight away which was key. The rehab team at the hospital were brilliant. They pushed me to my limits- I had to relearn how to walk, how to talk, and to try and use my hands again. I spent a month in Altnagelvin Hospital and was then transferred to Waterside Hospital where I spent a further month completing rehab."

When Oran was discharged from hospital, he continued his rehab journey at home and sought out external agencies who might be able to provide support. That is when he found out about Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke. Oran attended our local Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP) and found the support and help at the group invaluable. PREP is a physiotherapy led, community-based course which focuses on exercise and education. He says; "Everyone at the NICHS groups knows what it's like to live with a stroke. They understand. That is so important, it really helps. Working with NICHS has been brilliant for me. PREP has helped me physically but mentally it's really helped too. The team provide great support and information to help you on your recovery journey."



Oran is someone who has always liked to set goals and he achieved one of his most challenging in aid of NICHS. Oran explains; "I go to gym sessions at the Old Library Trust which are focussed on supporting people with health issues and disabilities to exercise safely. One of the instructors put the idea of doing a triathlon into my head. I never thought I would do something like that again, but he said, 'you're back in the pool, you're on the spin bike, you're on the treadmill walking. Why don't you do one?' I just thought, 'right, that's my next goal'. I decided to do it for NICHS because they give so much to people living with stroke, chest and heart conditions through their services and groups, and I thought it was time for me to give something back."

Oran's original target was to raise £500 but he far exceeded this, reaching an amazing £4000. He says; **"I didn't think I would raise so much but it was fantastic. My triathlon consisted of 15 lengths of the swimming pool, a 12-mile spin and a 1km walk on the treadmill. On the day I didn't know how I was going to do but I was fine. People called in to wish me well and the adrenaline helped but my mindset was 'just do it' and I felt a great sense of achievement when I finished."**

Oran has an inspirational way of looking at his stroke, saying; "After I was able to come to terms more with my stroke, I found I was actually much happier in life than before. Although I have my physical disabilities- I've lost total flexion in my right leg and only 30% of my arm power has come back- mentally I've accepted it. I've learnt to slow down. Beforehand life was just hectic, but I had a lot of time to think after my stroke. I have had to learn to adapt and look at things from a different point of view."

"I have a good mindset and great people behind me, like my wife Edel. She is basically my right side now- it's not just me who the stroke has affected it's her also and she has never once complained. Edel has been a tower of strength and continues to be."

"I try and take the positives out of what I have and what I can do and work on that. Every day is another day and that's a good day. I always say there are people worse off than me- I'm lucky, I got another go in life."

We Research

LOCAL RESEARCH / SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAMME / LIFE CHANGING ADVANCES IN TREATMENT AND PREVENTION OF CHEST, HEART & STROKE ILLNESSES

With your help, we've funded high quality research in local universities and hospitals since 1946. Research is vital in the fight to prevent chest, heart, and stroke conditions.

A special thank you to our Scientific Research Committee for their ongoing support of the grants process, and to the researchers who reviewed and scored the applications we received.



19

research studies live at the end of the financial year



4

new projects funded this year



£454,069

awarded to new research projects in 2023/24



New Research Studies 2023/24

Heart



Baby Hearts 2: Developmental and educational outcomes of children with Congenital Heart Disease

We funded the first Baby Hearts research in 2013. This study will follow up with the babies in the original study to see how they are developing.

Professor Frank Casey, Ulster University, £98,134

Stroke



Effectiveness of technology-guided mental imagery to improve arm and hand function following stroke

Can a computer game help improve arm function post stroke?

Dr Kathy Ruddy, QUB, £153,454

Co-design and evaluation of a physical activity maintenance intervention for people with stroke

This research will develop a programme that will help stroke survivors stay active long-term.

Dr Katy Pedlow, Ulster University, £112,726

Respiratory



Human Epididymis Protein 4: A therapeutic target in Pulmonary Fibrosis

Can a diabetes drug be used to treat Pulmonary Fibrosis?

Dr Bettina Schock, QUB, £89,755



We Prevent

HEALTH PROMOTION / PREVENTION / ADVICE / HEALTH CHECKS / WORKPLACE, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES

We are the only local charity in Northern Ireland dedicated to the prevention of chest, heart and stroke illnesses.

We offer services to workplaces, communities and schools to help detect early signs of chest, heart and stroke illness and provide information to empower individuals to make healthy lifestyle changes. We also work with a range of partners to promote health and raise awareness of the symptoms of chest, heart and stroke conditions and to prevent obesity by encouraging people to enjoy healthy and active lives.

Our health promotion and prevention services include:



A Public Health Agency initiative

Work Well Live Well is a **free** Workplace Health and Wellbeing Support Service funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and delivered by Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke. Available to any workplaces based in the Northern, Southern, South Eastern and Belfast Health & Social Care Trust areas, the service provides personalised support to improve the wellbeing of employees. This includes carrying out a health and wellbeing survey and developing a bespoke health action plan for your organisation, as well as providing Health Champion and Mental Health First Aid training and access to webinars and resources.



Well Checks

We offer Well Checks for individuals as well as packages for workplaces and community groups to help detect the early warning signs associated with developing chest, heart and stroke conditions.

Our Well Checks:

- Assess and check for atrial fibrillation, blood pressure and cholesterol issues, as well as measuring your weight, body fat and lifestyle risk factors, with other options available to suit your needs.
- Empower people to make informed and manageable lifestyle changes.
- Promote organisational health and wellbeing with long-lasting benefits.
- Also includes personal and organisational health reports and action planning template.

We also offer pop-up health checks covering atrial fibrillation and blood pressure in communities across Northern Ireland throughout the year, particularly in areas of deprivation.



Well Webinar

Our interactive webinars empower people to make informed lifestyle changes that will reduce their risk of developing chest, heart and stroke illnesses. Webinars are available on a wide range of topics, providing the information and tools needed to enable employees to look after and improve their health. Bespoke webinars to suit your business needs can also be produced and delivered.

Topics you can choose from include:

- Healthy Eating
- Physical Activity: Cardiovascular Exercise
- Physical Activity: Strengthening & Stretching Exercise
- Stress
- Sleep
- Alcohol
- A Healthy Heart
- Know Your Signs and Symptoms
- Smoking

Well Talk

Well Talks provide health information to enable your employees to improve their overall health and wellbeing. Our health promotion team will provide information on lifestyle changes employees can make thereby reducing their risk of developing chest, heart and stroke conditions.

Topics you can choose from include all Well Webinar topics, plus:

- Know Your ABCs
- Healthy Eating on a Budget
- Support Your Wellbeing

Well Mind

Well Mind is a workshop which focuses on recognising the triggers of stress and the impact that it can have on your employees. The session will enable employees to understand how stress can be managed in a positive way, using tools such as breathing techniques, reframing and mindfulness.



This supportive behaviour change programme motivates individuals who are ready to make healthier lifestyle changes.

Our health promotion team help people identify areas that they wish to improve and support them to make these positive changes through personal face-to-face and online support.



Learning early how to enjoy healthy, active lives is key to giving children the best start in life. It helps them grow into adults who are less at risk of serious illnesses like chest, heart and stroke conditions, as well as obesity.

At NICHS we support families, schools and young people by educating them about these issues. We provide interactive health workshops, practical tips and advice on how to eat well, stay active and understand the risk factors to serious illness. We offer our Chester's Challenge programme for primary schools as well as Well Talks for secondary schools and colleges.

Topics covered include:

- Healthy Eating
- Physical Activity
- Stress
- Alcohol
- Smoking/E-cigarettes
- Sleep

Vaping Campaign

In autumn 2023 we launched our vaping campaign in response to the misunderstandings around the potential health risks associated with vaping and the huge increase in the number of young people using vapes.

The campaign's aim was to change people's misconceptions that there is little risk associated with regular vaping and that vapes are harmless compared to cigarettes. This is not true, and we wanted to get this message out to prevent more young people from taking up and getting addicted to vaping. The long-term health

implications are unknown - just as they once were with tobacco.

The campaign included extensive outdoor, digital and radio advertising. We created bold campaign artwork to attract young people. We took vaping myths and turned them around to reveal the facts about vaping and showed some side effects of using nicotine vapes.

We hosted an online vaping clinic, targeting schools, youth workers and sports clubs. The information session featured speakers from our Schools team, respiratory consultants, and other medical professionals. We also created an online vaping hub of resources and information on our website.

To support our campaign Mary Griffin and her daughter Sarah shared their life-threatening experience of vaping after Sarah was admitted to ICU and put in an induced coma after she had been using vapes.

The vaping campaign was the most successful awareness campaign ever run by NICHS and our reach was worldwide, resulting in coverage across local, national, and international newspapers, news websites, TV, and radio. As a result, we won the Excellence in Marketing category at the 2024 Belfast Telegraph Business Awards.

"Your Number's Up" Blood Pressure Campaign

Our blood pressure awareness campaign ran during April, May and June 2023, aiming to draw awareness to the fact 1 in 2 heart attacks and strokes are linked to the condition and urging the public to get checked and know their numbers.

We hosted an Online Blood Pressure Advice Session which allowed attendees to send in questions for a panel of health professionals to answer. The session also discussed information about preventing, detecting and managing high blood pressure to help reduce stroke and heart attack risk.

Our Health Promotion team also visited a number of MACE stores, shopping centres, and community organisations throughout Northern Ireland during the campaign to provide free pop-up blood pressure checks to local communities. Over 1050 checks were carried out, with 40% of people being signposted to their GP for high blood pressure.

Health Promotion & Prevention Impact 23/24



31,260

We offer targeted services to workplaces, communities and schools to help detect early signs of chest, heart and stroke illness and empower individuals to make healthy choices.

people and 294 organisations across Northern Ireland benefitted from our range of health promotion services



Health promotion in schools



18,168

pupils, parents and teachers took part in our schools programmes

87

schools and community organisations



Chester's Challenge Programme (Primary)

36 Schools

1,708

took part in the Chester's Challenge Programme

65%

of pupils were from extended schools

98%

teachers rated Chester's Challenge as **5 star** out of 5 stars

87%

pupils "really enjoyed" or "enjoyed" Chester's Challenge

"A fabulous and engaging programme which my children really enjoyed and learnt so much from. Would definitely recommend. Thank you!"

"Both staff and children thoroughly enjoyed the programme and it fits perfectly into our 'World Around Us' topic. We also had a parent request NICHs work with their youth football club because the children were so impressed."

Compared to before the programme, pupils showed an increase in knowledge about...

99%

knew they
need to sleep
10 hours a night

98%

knew breakfast is the
most important meal
of the day

90%

knew they need to do
60 minutes of physical
activity a day

90%

knew they need to
drink 6-8 glasses of
water a day

68%

knew they should eat
5 portions of fruit and
vegetables a day

Well Talks (Post-Primary)



15,462

took part

99

Talks

42

Schools and
organisations

Well Talks by topic

14,233

students, teachers, parents,
and youth workers (92% of people)
received a talk about vaping

70%

of Well Talks covered the
topic of vaping (41 talks)

Other Well Talk
topics covered:
% of Well Talks

8.5%

Alcohol

7%

Sleep

5%

Smoking

5%

Stress

5%

Other
topics

Health & Homeless Programme



658

people
benefitted

Health promotion in the workplace

**WORK
WELL**

**LIVE
WELL**

A Public Health Agency initiative

3,647
employees
benefitted

131
Health
Champions
trained

1,323

Well Checks
delivered

100%

of Health Champions
completed Mental Health
First Aid training

224

attended
learning
events

97%

reported that Health
Champion training
increased their awareness
of workplace health issues

99%

rated Health
Champion training
4 or 5 out of 5 stars

Well Checks



9,000 people received checks

2,925 people (33% of all those checked)
were referred to their GP for additional support

Demand for our Well Checks has been overwhelming this year with local people seeking alternatives to visiting their GP to check in on their health. During the year, we provided 9,000 health checks, helping to identify Atrial Fibrillation (AF), a

type of irregular heartbeat that increases your risk of having a stroke, high blood pressure, and other risk factors. With this information, we encouraged recipients to make healthy lifestyle changes, and signposted them to seek professional help.

1.3%

referred to GP with
possible AF

25%

referred for help with
high blood pressure

12%

referred for help with
high cholesterol

People who received a check said...

99.4% staff were caring and showed respect

99.7% staff communicated clearly and simply

99.9% staff listened, answered questions,
and acted professionally

99.7% would recommend Health Checks
to others

"At 54 I was delighted to be told I had a metabolic age of 40, only to find out my blood pressure was dangerously high. I've been put on medication and am undergoing tests. Thanks to my health check I'll hopefully avoid, or significantly reduce, the risk of heart attack or stroke. I can't thank the NICHs staff member enough. She was calm, took this very seriously, and could well have saved my life! I'd strongly recommend this amazing service to everyone."

"My Well Check surpassed my expectations. From start to finish, the NICHs employee's warmth and genuine interest in my wellbeing were very comforting. Throughout the appointment she explained procedures clearly and demonstrated expert knowledge. She took the time to go above and beyond, to make sure the advice she gave was tailored to me. Overall, my experience was outstanding, and I would highly recommend it."



Fundraising

Almost 90% of our income comes from public donations. Most of the work you can read about in this report was made possible by the unstoppable determination of individuals, families, friends and companies who are passionate about helping us. We can't thank everyone enough.

All of the money we receive stays in Northern Ireland, funding programmes and supporting local people right here in our communities, workplaces, schools, hostels and universities.

There are lots of ways to help and support us. From becoming a regular giver and donating a small amount of money each month, organising fundraising events with friends or work colleagues, to leaving a gift in your will. We really appreciate any support you can give us, so we can continue to help everyone in Northern Ireland living with chest, heart and stroke conditions.

Please visit www.nichs.org.uk/how-you-can-help for more information.



£3.95 million
raised through public
donations and gifts in wills



3279
regular givers



112
companies
fundraised for us



26
charity champions
volunteered for us



73
people gave gifts in wills



1019
families chose to support
us with donations in lieu of
funeral flowers in memory
of their loved one



77
couples purchased
wedding favours or made
a donation in celebration
of their big day



417
community events
organised across NI



1116
supporters took part
in events and challenges



£72K
raised from our annual
Red Dress Fun Run event

giftaid it

Over £88K
additional income
from claiming Gift Aid
on donations

A life-changing legacy

Gifts in wills fund more than a third of our work. A gift left to support our work in your will could improve the lives of thousands of local people in so many different ways. From life-changing care and support services, to ground-breaking research and lifesaving prevention work.

When combined, deaths due to chest, heart and stroke conditions are the number one cause of death in Northern Ireland. We want to be there caring for people with these conditions and finding ways to prevent them in the first place. This is how gifts in wills can make a huge difference.

During 2023/24 we received **gifts in wills totalling £2,105,983** from **73 incredible people**, who have left behind their own individual legacy of hope and care. We are truly grateful for their generosity and thoughtfulness towards others.

Give a Regular Donation – Make a Lasting Impact

Every month, **3279 local people** help support our services with a regular direct debit or payroll donation. Their gifts enable us to make future plans and provide life-changing care services.

Regular donations can help make an immediate and lasting impact on people whose lives have been devastated by a chest, heart or stroke illness, helping them and their families get the support they need to recover, rehabilitate and return to living life to the fullest.



Justine's Story – Blood Pressure

Justine Daly was not concerned about her health but that all changed in an instant when she was diagnosed with dangerously high blood pressure and told she needed to seek immediate medical advice. Justine's high blood pressure was detected after she attended one of Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke's workplace health checks.

Justine says; "My employer had organised for NICHHS to come to our workplace to carry out health checks. I saw this as an opportunity to get things checked either for piece of mind or a nudge to change something. I had a similar check back in 2019 and although my blood pressure was elevated, it was nowhere near a critical level. I certainly didn't expect to find out my blood pressure was off the Richter scale and that I should go to A&E immediately."

"My check was carried out by a lady called Valerie from NICHHS's Health Promotion team. She had a very professional and caring manner, explained what the health check would involve and that the blood pressure check would be at the end. My results from the other tests were all great. I had a metabolic age of 40 and at 54 I was delighted to hear that."

"When it was time for the blood pressure check Valerie did it on my left arm first. She asked me to take a few moments to relax, and then measured it again. Once more, she asked me to try and relax and then did the measurement on my right arm. That is when she told me I needed to go to A&E because my blood pressure was dangerously high."

Justine recalls,

“

It took a moment for the news that it was that high to sink in. I hadn't experienced anything, no symptoms or warning signs, which would have made me concerned about my blood pressure or health in general. I was expecting it to be elevated like previously but not so high I had to go to hospital. It came as a complete shock.

”

"Valerie could see the look of horror on my face and must have thought another course of action might be worth trying. She said that I should phone my GP surgery and ask their advice. If they felt I didn't necessarily need to go straight to A&E and would arrange an urgent appointment with my doctor, then she would be happy with that advice. Valerie waited with me until I got a call back from my doctor, which was very reassuring and kind."

"My surgery prioritised me, getting an appointment for the following morning and Valerie advised me to go home and do nothing but rest, which I did. I was obviously feeling quite anxious as being told that you need to go to A&E makes you realise just how serious the situation is. Valerie was so calm and considerate however and that really helped."

"I saw my doctor the next day and he was fantastic. He checked me over, and given my previous history of elevated blood pressure, he prescribed medication right away. He explained that for me, it was not a case of trying lifestyle changes to make a difference to my blood pressure such as losing weight or reducing my salt intake. The nurse took my bloods to get a baseline and I had to go back two weeks later for a review and an ECG. The doctor was happy with everything, so I was advised to keep taking my medication as prescribed and go back in a month for a further check-up."

Reflecting on her diagnosis, Justine says;

"At first, I thought, 'it might not really be that serious because I can't feel anything, I feel fine', but that's the thing many people don't realise, you don't necessarily have symptoms when your blood pressure is through the roof."

"I have been wearing a fitness tracker watch for years and it measures heart rate, but I didn't realise quite how different that is to monitoring your blood pressure. That is something I would love people to understand- just because your heart rate and other vitals are ok, your blood pressure might not be. That is why it is so important to check it. If you don't and it is high, it could then sadly be too late. Finding out about my high blood pressure really could have saved my life as I was able to seek medical help."



"I also think people don't realise that these things can happen at an early age, you do not have to be in your seventies or eighties. I am 54 and was leading a normal, healthy, relatively active life but my high blood pressure could have hit me like a brick. I could have had a heart attack or stroke which would be lifechanging."

"It was also very hard to hear that I was on medication for life. That made me feel a bit apprehensive at first but after I had time to reflect, I thought, if a medication can improve my health and reduce my risk of a heart attack or stroke that's a good thing, not a negative. That is another message I would stress to people- if you are prescribed blood pressure medication, please take it and do not put yourself at any unnecessary risk."

Thankfully, Justine is responding to her treatment plan and is looking to the future. "I am still at an early stage in my journey, but I am trying to get back to normal as much as possible. For the first week or two after I was diagnosed, I was exhausted. I am feeling better as times goes on, however. I am walking a lot and enjoying Tai Chi and hope that with time I can get back to doing more intensive exercise like hiking in the Mournes, but that is something I will discuss with my doctor first."

Justine concludes; "Finding out about my high blood pressure has had a huge impact on me but the fact is, it could well have saved my life. If my employer hadn't organised the health checks with NICHHS who knows what might have happened. I would have been non-the-wiser as to the risk I was at, and I want to thank Valerie and the charity. I feel lucky to be able to share my story and would encourage everyone to check their blood pressure, no matter what their age, lifestyle, and so on. **Do not put it off, because you could be too late."**










Thank you

to everyone who supported us in 2023/24

Almost 90% of our income comes from public donations.

Find out how you can support us at www.nichs.org.uk

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