

Our Impact

REPORT

2024/2025



Chest
Heart &
Stroke



Welcome

from **Declan Cunnane CEO**

I am delighted to share with you our 2024/25 Annual Impact Report.

This year 36,271 people and organisations directly benefited from our Care and Health Promotion services. When we include family members and others who are indirectly supported, that number more than doubles.

We are proud to be Northern Ireland's leading health charity, supporting those affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions across Northern Ireland.

There are at least 400,000 people living with a chest, heart or stroke condition in Northern Ireland today. Every day 17 lives are lost to these illnesses, making it the number one cause of death.

As we reflect on our great achievements and highlights this year, we recognize that there is still much to be done. The need for our work has never been greater and our commitment to prevent chest, heart and stroke conditions and support people affected by them has never been stronger.

There have been many highlights this year.

Our flagship event the Red Dress Fun Run was a tremendous success, and in fact our most successful to date, raising an incredible £74,000. It is always heartwarming to see so many dedicated supporters running or walking in memory of loved ones or simply to support our great charity and the work we do. Thank you to everyone who took part and raised much needed funds.

This year we funded four new research projects through our Scientific Research Grants Programme, bringing our total to 22 active projects across local universities and hospitals. My sincere thanks go to our Scientific Research Committee for their dedication and commitment

In May and June we ran our annual Blood Pressure campaign, highlighting awareness that 1 in 2 heart attacks and strokes are caused by high blood pressure. We urge you to be aware of your blood pressure and get it checked regularly. In September and October we were delighted to launch our Heart Failure public awareness campaign to make people aware of the symptoms of Heart Failure. You can read more about this campaign on page 16.

It has been another award winning year for us. Our Head of Communications, Linda Rodgers, won the Leading Communications & Policy award at the CO3 Leadership Awards and our Communications team won the Best Use of Social Media award at the NI Social Media awards. We were also delighted to be shortlisted in the Irish News Workplace and Employment Awards in the Best Place to Work category.

As a charity almost 90% of our income comes from public donations and we're extremely grateful to our fundraisers, supporters, volunteers, followers and friends who make our work possible.

Every pound raised stays within Northern Ireland. Your support allows us to rebuild lives with care and support services, fund groundbreaking research to improve prevention and treatment, and work with schools, communities and workplaces to help prevent future chest, heart and stroke illnesses.

Thank you very much for your support. Without your help we would be unable to make such a positive impact on the lives of thousands of people in Northern Ireland.

Declan Cunnane, CEO

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.



£4,919,879

expenditure on charitable activities.

(based on unaudited accounts for the year ended 31/3/25)



36,271

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 NICHs 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



Gerry Rooney – Stroke Survivor

When Gerry Rooney, from Belfast, retired at 66 he thought it would be a well-earned opportunity to take things easier and enjoy life. The last thing he expected to happen was for him to have a stroke. But whilst watching TV one night, that's exactly what happened and Gerry sadly lost his vision.

Gerry recalls; "I was sitting in the living room watching television and it was like a black cloud came over and it covered the TV, and I couldn't see it, only this black cloud. I looked around the room and it was pure black. It was like living in a black cloud. I just couldn't see."

"The last thing I thought it would be was a stroke. I didn't know what it was, I just couldn't see, and I didn't know what to do. I wasn't in any pain so I made my way up to bed thinking whatever it was it would be away in the morning. But when the morning came, it was still there and my daughter, who lives with me, told me that something wasn't right, so she took me and my wife to hospital."

"I was taken in on a wheelchair and I was seen right away. They did various tests and found my blood pressure was through the roof. They then told me I had had a stroke and would have to be admitted."

"I ended up in the Royal hospital for three and a half weeks."

As well as Gerry's sight, the stroke also affected his balance and arm as he explains; "Whilst in hospital I had physio, and the physiotherapist showed me how to walk and balance again. I can walk, but not too far and I need help to get up the stairs. I can now move my arm. I can't lift them too high, but my arms are good. The only problem I have now is with my sight."

"Everything became an obstacle because I couldn't see. I had two operations on my eyes while I was in the hospital but I can't see at all in my left eye and there's only partial vision in the other eye."



“When I was told I had a stroke I felt shocked, why would this have happened to me? I was 66 at the time. I had just retired and whilst my health wasn’t brilliant, I was looking forward to living the life and then this happened to me.”

The stroke has greatly impacted Gerry’s life, leaving him unable to do many of the things he used to enjoy and take pride in. “Before my stroke I was a very independent person. For instance, we have been living in our house for over 40 years, and I used to do the decorating. I can’t do that now because I basically can’t see it. Recently we had a patch on the wall in the hall that was stained, and I had to get a guy out to put one straight strip of wallpaper on. It nearly killed me to have to get someone else to do that. It only took him half an hour, but I saw that as my job, I do that.”

“Stroke just rips away all your confidence. It takes away all your self-esteem, just the fact that you can’t do the things you used to be able to do. For people who haven’t had a stroke they might think these sounds like simple things but to people who have had a stroke like me it’s very hard.”

“The stroke has affected my vision to the point I can only see the right half of the television now. Also, if I’m reading a newspaper or a magazine and say the word ‘Liverpool’ comes up, I can only see the word ‘pool’, I can’t see the ‘Liver’.”

“In my own home I know where everything is so I can get on and have adapted o.k. The problem is when I go out. Because I can’t see I have to have people to hold on to and tell me to watch for steps and when to cross the road. I can’t go out on my own anymore which has taken away my independence.”

“I’ve been in different hospitals and even went private to see if anything could be done about my sight as it was very important to me to do everything I could to try and fix it. Unfortunately, all the answers were the same - it couldn’t be fixed. I’ve been left with no choice but to try to adjust to things.”

“It can feel physically and emotionally difficult at times as you feel like you’re being watched all the time and I don’t like that, but that’s the way it is, and everybody looks after me so well.”

After he was discharged from hospital a community nurse referred Gerry to us, telling him

about our services and how we could help him post stroke. That is when Gerry met Tracey.

Gerry explains; “Tracey is a Care Services Co-ordinator at Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke. She came and visited me at home one day and from that day to this day, she has been absolutely brilliant. She is an angel, a wee angel on earth.”



“Tracey told me about all the NICHS courses I could do, and I started going to the Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP), which is a physio class where you do exercises to help you get stronger. It lasts for about an hour and a half and after the exercises you learn about things like healthy eating and have a chat about different things. All the people at PREP have had a stroke so they know what it is like. Everybody is lovely at PREP, like the volunteers. It’s like a big family, obviously with Tracey being the boss!”

Talking about the support he has received through PREP Gerry says; “I think it’s brilliant and it gets you out and about. If I didn’t know about PREP I would have been stuck in my house looking at four walls. I can’t watch the television anymore and my mental health would have been badly affected.”

“I have received so much help from NICHS and from going to their classes. I have met lots of different people and they have been brilliant. The volunteers like Linda, Alan and Margaret, they have helped me as well. They’re lovely people and can’t do enough for you.”

“NICHS also helps the whole family. I have been married to my wife Margaret for 42 years and we have only one daughter, Louise. Tracey has become part of our family. She’s a lovely girl and my family all think the same, she has helped us all.”

Care Impact 24/25

Our care services help people affected by chest, heart, and stroke conditions by providing emotional support, practical help, and self management programmes that aid recovery and improve wellbeing. This year, we supported 2,807 people through our care services. Many went on to take part in two more of our support programmes, with a total of 4,936 support activities provided.



2,807
people supported
during the year.

4,936
support activities
provided.

Cardiac Support	Respiratory Support	Stroke Support	Carer Support
324	515	1,765	203

Number of people who received each of our services:

Family Support	2,807	Wellness Groups	901
PREP	770	Taking Control Self-Management Programme	235
Breathing Better	139	Heart Strong	84



36,927

Number of times we engaged with people accessing our care programme, whether by providing a service, support, or just a chat.

Family Support

2,807
people
supported

1,586
home
visits

6,708
support
calls

1,394
referred to
our services

1,720
referred / signposted
to external services

Those who received Family Support said...

98%
felt listened to
and supported

98%
were confident
managing their
condition

90%
felt confident
accessing support

79%
felt less
isolated

Stroke Support



1,765

people who were supported
by our stroke services

PREP (Post Rehab Exercise Programme)



770

people completed at least one cycle of PREP

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

91%

showed an improvement in functional exercises.

83%

improved in movements needed for everyday tasks.

59%

reported an improvement in their mental wellbeing.



The number of people at risk of falls decreased by **39%**.



The number of people with probable clinical depression dropped by half.



As a group, they improved their mobility, walking and balance – getting moving 4.6 seconds faster on average.

Respiratory Support



515

**people were supported by
our respiratory services**



139

**took part in our Breathing
Better programme**

The Breathing Better programme was rated 9.5 out of 10

100% would recommend the programme to others

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

89%

were more
confident managing
their condition

90%

reported being
more active

93%

more confident
managing their
mental health

92%

more confident
dealing with day
to day tasks

Taking Control Self-Management Programme



235

**took part in our Taking
Control programme**

Taking Control was rated 4.8 out of 5 stars

98% would definitely recommend the programme to others

93% said that the programme helped them feel more in control of their condition

96%

more confident
managing their
condition

98%

more confident
managing their
lifestyle

97%

could better
manage their
condition

96%

felt more
in control of
health generally

Wellness Groups



901

**people benefitted from
our Wellness Groups**

People felt more knowledgeable about how to manage their condition, and felt less isolated after taking part in our Wellness Sessions Programme:

96%

reported increased
knowledge how to
manage their condition

96%

reported increased
knowledge how to access
support they need

95%

reported increased
knowledge of a healthy
lifestyle

96%

felt less
isolated

The Wellness Groups were rated 4.9 out of 5 stars

96% would definitely recommend the programme to others

92% said that they definitely benefitted from the peer support

Cardiac services



324

**people were supported
through our cardiac services**



84

**people took part
in Heart Strong**

The Heart Strong programme was rated 9.5 out of 10

97% would definitely recommend the programme to others

Those who took part reported an increase in confidence :

88%

managing their
condition

94%

finding
support

86%

being more
active

82%

dealing with
everyday tasks



Halls of Hope

We are delighted to have had the opportunity to create Halls of Hope in Stroke Wards throughout Northern Ireland.

The walls in our Halls of Hope provides patients and their family members with information about the charity and the services we offer, to help with their recovery after they leave hospital.

The people featured on the Wall of Hope, our Hope Heroes, are previous stroke survivors and people who have used our services. They share how we helped them on their post-stroke recovery journey.

We hope these stories, and our Halls of Hope, will help inform, inspire, and encourage stroke patients and their families as they face difficult times and to show that there is hope after having a stroke.



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 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 24/25



We campaigned in support of the Tobacco and Vaping Bill and successfully lobbied for the introduction of a vaping register. The Northern Ireland Assembly passed a Legislative Motion ensuring the full Tobacco and Vapes Bill will be implemented in Northern Ireland.



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



We have engaged with the Department of Health on stroke service reform.



As part of the Community Rehabilitation Alliance NI, we are pressing for rehabilitation, for all conditions, to be made a greater government priority and for recognition that all patients should have a “right to rehab”.



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.





Public Awareness Campaign – Heart Failure

In September 2024 we launched a new heart failure awareness campaign which aimed to educate the public about the condition, its symptoms, and encouraged people to seek medical advice if they are experiencing any of the signs of heart failure, due to the fact it can have more serious outcomes than a number of cancers.

It is estimated that 20,231 people are living with heart failure in Northern Ireland and that 6,391 hospital admissions per year here are due to the condition. The number of people diagnosed with heart failure has increased by 40% in the last ten years so we are really concerned about how these figures may rise over the coming years. In fact, it is estimated there is likely to be an increase in people being diagnosed with heart failure in excess of 50% in the next 25 years, due to an ageing population and rising obesity and diabetes levels.

Our campaign, which included extensive outdoor, digital and radio advertising, helped people across Northern Ireland learn more about the signs and symptoms of this often-misunderstood condition. In a recent survey, 66% of people in NI did not know the symptoms of heart failure¹ and it is crucial the public are aware of these.

The most common symptoms of heart failure are breathlessness, exhaustion, and swollen ankles. Symptoms may develop quickly or gradually over weeks or months. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, we would urge you to make an appointment to speak to your GP as soon as you can. If you do have heart failure, the sooner it is diagnosed the sooner you can get started on the correct treatment and care plan which is vitally important.

Our campaign was developed in conjunction with local heart failure healthcare professionals including Dr Patricia Campbell, Clinical Lead for Heart Failure Service for Northern Ireland, and Edith Donnelly, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Heart Failure, at the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. We were also pleased to be supported by Heart Failure Warriors NI.

Heart failure is a medical condition which means the heart is not able to pump effectively. In very simple terms, the heart is a muscular pump, and its job is to pump blood around body. To do this it needs to contract, or squeeze, and relax. Heart failure happens when the heart does not contract or relax as well as it should. This causes symptoms such as breathlessness, fatigue, and fluid retention. You might notice that you

Breathless?

It could be a symptom of

heart failure.



Are you breathless during everyday activities or lying down?

Heart Failure Symptoms include:

- **Breathlessness**
- **Exhaustion**
- **Swollen Ankles**

Get it checked.

Talk to your GP.

Visit www.nichs.org.uk/heartfailure

Chest Heart & Stroke

cannot walk as far as you used to because you get breathless, or that you get tired when doing your normal activities. You might also notice that your feet, legs, ankles, or stomach start to swell.

It is a long-term condition, and if left untreated, symptoms get worse over time. With the right treatment however it can be managed, and the symptoms can be controlled for many years. Heart failure does not mean your heart has stopped working completely; it just needs treatment and support to help it work better which is why it is so vitally important people are aware of the condition and its symptoms so they can seek medical help as early as possible.

There are numerous causes of heart failure. These include damage to the heart muscle after a heart attack, an abnormal heart rhythm, high blood pressure or problems with the valves in the heart. It can also be caused by congenital heart disease or cardiomyopathy. All these conditions can damage or put extra strain on the heart over a long period of time.

Heart failure cannot be cured but it is important to highlight that treatment can help to control the symptoms, improve quality of life, and slow the progression of the condition. Treatment can include medication which is usually prescribed by specialist heart failure nurses as they are experts in getting heart failure patients on the correct medication, at the correct doses.

If you are living with a heart failure diagnosis, the important thing to remember is the condition is treatable and manageable. There are cardiologists and specialist nurses who are experts in this field and will guide and support you throughout your journey.

Our Care Services team are also here to provide support. Our Family Support Service will give the personalised information and advice you and your family need as you navigate life with heart failure. Our Heart Strong Cardiac Education Programme is designed to help participants to learn more about their health and take the steps needed to move forward post diagnosis, and our Taking Control Self-Management Programme provides a range of skills which will help you to manage your long-term condition better and improve your confidence. You are not alone and we are here for those who need us.



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.



22

research studies live at the end of the financial year.

Cost - £1.8 million



4

new projects funded this year



£401,105

awarded to new research projects in 2024/25



New Research Studies 2024/25

Heart



Establishing Survival Rates and Examining the Chain of Survival in Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrests in N.Ireland. This study will find out how many people survive a cardiac arrest that happens outside of hospital in Northern Ireland and look at what helps or hinders survival.

NI Ambulance Service, £97,054.50

Chest



Kallikrein in COPD Exacerbations (KallCo). This study will look at how inflammation and blood clotting increase during flare-ups of COPD. The researchers hope to find new ways to prevent heart attacks and strokes in people with COPD.

Belfast HSCT, £150,905

Risk Factor



Fish, Omega-3 Supplements, and the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease - Start Young and Live Long. This study will test whether eating more fish or taking omega-3 supplements can lower the risk of heart disease in young adults who rarely eat fish.

Ulster University, £102,714.44

Stroke



Process Evaluation of Patient Experiences Using Brain Computer Interface-Based Rehabilitation Following Stroke. This study will gather feedback from stroke survivors and their carers on using a new brain-computer headset that helps people regain arm movement after a stroke.

QUB, £50,431



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, Western and Belfast Health & Social Care Trust areas, the service provides personalised support to improve the wellbeing of employees in workplaces across Northern Ireland. 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 from our Well Community team 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

“Your Number’s Up” Blood Pressure Campaign

Our blood pressure awareness campaign ran during May and June 2024, 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.

Over 280,000 people, or around 1 in 5 of the adult population in Northern Ireland, are living with high blood pressure but there is a significant number of people, around 120,000, who have high blood pressure and do not realise it. Shockingly, this means at least a quarter of the adult population here live with high blood pressure. This gives us great cause for concern.

Undetected high blood pressure is often known as ‘The Silent Killer’ due to the fact it rarely causes any physical symptoms or warning signs and is often only discovered after someone suffers a stroke or heart attack. The only way to know what your blood pressure is, and if it is high, is to have it measured and that is what we are urging the public to do through our campaign, and beyond.

Many people associate high blood pressure with older people, but high blood pressure can affect anyone, at any age. It is important people are not complacent about their health just because they are in a younger age bracket.

A blood pressure check is simple and only takes a few minutes, but it really could help save your life. There are a number of ways you can get your blood pressure checked. You can make an appointment with your GP or visit your local pharmacy which may operate a blood pressure monitoring service. You could also buy a blood pressure machine for home monitoring.

During the campaign our Health Promotion team 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. 460 checks were carried out, with 35% of people being signposted to their GP for high blood pressure.

Health Promotion & Prevention Impact 24/25



33,464

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 394 organisations across Northern Ireland benefitted from our range of health promotion services



22,996

Schools Programmes



1,804

Work Well Live Well



8,166

Well Checks

Health promotion in schools



22,996

students took part in our schools programmes

121

schools and community organisations

Chester's Challenge Programme (Primary)



3,466

took part in the Chester's Challenge Programme

46

Schools

100%

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

87%

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

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

96%

knew they need to sleep
10 hours a night

97%

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)



18,742

Took part

68

Talks

68

**Schools and
organisations**

Well Talks by topic

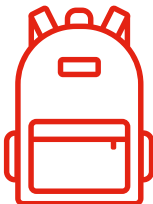
16,420

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

88%

of Well Talks covered the
topic of vaping (55 talks)

Active Breaks



788

Pupils



7

Schools

Health promotion in the workplace



1,804
employees
benefitted

98
Health Champions
trained

1,412

Well Checks
delivered

84%

confident or very
confident in role

85%

motivated or very
motivated in role

97%

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

97%

rated Health
Champion training
4 or 5 out of 5 stars

98%

would
recommend
WWLW to others

Well Checks



8,166 people received checks

2,787 people, (34% 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 **8,166** 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%

signposted for
help with AF

22%

signposted for help with
high blood pressure

21%

signposted for help with
high cholesterol

People who received a check said...

99.9% staff were caring and showed respect

100% staff communicated clearly and simply

99.8% staff listened, answered questions,
and acted professionally

99.7% would recommend Health Checks
to others

"Even though some of the measurements were worse than I anticipated, it still gave me a starting point for improvement and a kick-start with information to help me make the changes that I need to improve my overall levels of health."

"It was really informative and was explained to me in a way I could understand, I really appreciate the time and patience taken with me. It's allowed me to think about how my lifestyle affects my body and ways I can positively impact it, thank you!"



John Meikleham -

Cardiac Survivor & Care Services Advisory Group Member

One of the main goals of NICHs's 2023-26 strategy is to involve and listen to people who are living with chest, heart and stroke conditions, as well as the carers of someone living with these illnesses. As a result, our Care Services Advisory Group was established.

The group meets once a quarter and currently has 13 members, 7 women and 6 men, each with a chest, heart or stroke condition and/or care for someone with one of these conditions.

Here we are sharing the story of one of our members, John Meikleham, who was on his way into work at the cardiac surgical unit in Belfast when he had a massive heart attack at the front door of the hospital. John was only in his forties and ultimately had to have a heart transplant.

John recalls; "I had my heart attack when I was 46. I had a bad family history as my father died when he was 56 and some of my uncles died in their fifties and early sixties as well."

"I knew I had angina and had an operation to insert a stent but unfortunately there was a complication, and the procedure had to be abandoned. I was waiting on a second stent when I had a heart attack on the way into work. I spent the next three weeks in intensive care on a ventilator. Within a couple of months, I recovered enough to have a defibrillator implanted and was transferred to the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle in England to be assessed for cardiac transplant."

"I was on the transplant list for about eleven months when I started to show a slight improvement, so I was taken off the list again. I then lived with heart failure for fifteen years before having an LVAD implanted in 2019. This is a mechanical device that's used to pump blood around the body when the heart is too weak to pump blood on its own. I was able to get by with that for two and a half years before needing a transplant again, which I had in 2022."

"There was a lot of doom and gloom before the cardiac transplant because I had lived with heart failure for so long. I had an LVAD with lots of complications for two and a half years and spent hundreds of days in hospital. Cardiac transplant is a very difficult surgery, and it took about twelve hours. I was off the ventilator four hours after the surgery however and was talking to my wife by video call eight hours after that. I recovered remarkably well thankfully."

Speaking about the signs something wasn't right with his cardiac health John says; "The lead up to my heart attack was typical. There was chest pain and shortness of breath. The shortness of breath is what I noticed originally but I made the assumption that I wasn't fit rather than something could be wrong with me health wise. Like many people my fitness could have been better. I was relatively fit, but my job didn't allow me too much time to be particularly good at that. I worked in the cardiac surgical unit in Belfast for 29 years which involved long hours and shift work."

"I went to my GP and had an ECG which didn't show anything was wrong but unfortunately you can have a normal ECG and still have coronary heart disease. I was lucky because of where I worked, and I was able to organise my own heart stress test. This test looks at how your heart works when you are exercising and mine had to be stopped within a couple of minutes because of the results the test was showing as well as the pain."

"In some ways I have two views of what happened to me. Number one, I should have known better. Regardless of working at the cardiac surgical unit, there were signs and symptoms that should have raised some concerns for me. Secondly, I had a heart attack at 46 years old. That means I almost certainly had coronary artery disease in my thirties. I feel like there should be better monitoring of people at a younger age, particularly for people with bad family histories. An ECG, blood pressure check, and a cholesterol test once a year would cost around £100. A reasonable estimate of the cost of my care to date is £1.5 million. Spending money can actually save money when it comes to health."

Raising awareness of heart health is very important to John. "Things like eating a balanced diet, not smoking, being physically active and so on, there are steps we can all take to help reduce our risk when it comes to cardiac conditions and that is what I want to raise awareness of."

"It isn't just people in their sixties and seventies who are affected by heart issues, younger people can be too. Awareness of lifestyle factors is key but so is understanding the subtle signs that can start to appear that something is wrong and how important it is to have these investigated. For me, if I look backwards my lessons are, be more aware of my own body and what's happening to me and don't be reluctant to go and get a potential issue checked out, which unfortunately many men are."

John is also passionate about raising awareness of the importance of organ donation. "People should talk about organ donation and transplants and what their wishes are more. It saved my life, and I wouldn't be here without my transplant, so I was incredibly lucky. I am very grateful to my donor and his family for their courage."



"I also ended up having to have a transplant because I ignored some of the symptoms that were creeping through so I would urge people, please don't do that. You don't want to end up on a transplant list potentially unnecessarily. If there is anything you aren't happy about health wise, have it checked out."

Wanting to do something positive despite everything he has been through John became involved with NICHs's Care Services Advisory Group.

John explains; "I've been a volunteer in some capacity since I was 16 but had to give most of what I did up in the run-up to my cardiac transplant. Afterwards I was looking for something to do and saw the group advertised. Given my history and background, I was interested in the potential to do something positive with the group. I very much enjoy it, and I've got a lot from it in terms of my own wellbeing with getting out and being part of something. I had to give up my career in the hospital due to my health. One day I was working in the cardiac unit, the next I was in intensive care, and I never went back to work again. I think people feel a sense of loss when that sort of thing happens to them, so volunteering is important."

"The services NICHs has developed in the 19 years since I had my heart attack are wonderful and include family support, the Taking Control Self Management Programme and the Heart Strong cardiac education and peer support programme. I would urge people affected by heart conditions to reach out and see how the charity might be able to help them."



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.



£3.2 million

raised through public donations and gifts in wills



3,110

regular givers



142

companies fundraised for us



27

charity champions volunteered for us



63

incredible people gave gifts in wills totaling £1,326,600



Over £331k

was donated by family and friends in memory of loved ones



51

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



435

community events organised across NI



Over 1,200

supporters took part in events and challenges



£74k

raised from our annual Red Dress Fun Run event

giftaid it

£103,710

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 2024/2025 we received **gifts in wills totalling £1,326,600** from **63 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, **3110 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.



Kim Colhun – Stroke Survivor

Kim Colhoun from Saintfield had a stroke at just 48 years old. Kim shared her story to help inspire other young stroke survivors to keep fighting on their recovery journey and to raise awareness that stroke is not something that only affects older people, it can happen to anyone, at any age.

Kim recalls; “I had my stroke on 22nd February 2017. It was just another ordinary day, and I could never have imagined it would involve me having a stroke.”

“At breakfast I was taking a vitamin supplement and my husband, Basil, noticed it was dribbling down my chin, my face had drooped, and I seemed confused. He asked me what was wrong, and I tried to reply but I couldn’t talk, my arms weren’t working, and I’d lost movement on my right-hand side. Thankfully, Basil remembered the FAST (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) campaign and immediately thought I might be having a stroke and phoned 999.”

“I was taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. A scan showed a large blood clot had formed on the left side of my brain. Thankfully I was given thrombolysis, which is a clot busting medicine, within two hours. I also underwent a thrombectomy, which is a procedure to remove blood clots and help restore blood flow to the brain and other organs. Without these treatments I probably would have died. A year after my stroke I asked my consultant what my

chances of survival would have been if I hadn’t had the thrombectomy and he said 16%. That made my blood run cold because unfortunately not all stroke patients are lucky enough to get thrombectomy.”

Despite her treatment, Kim was left with no speech, an inability to read and no motor skills. “It was like a bomb exploded in the filing cabinet of my brain. I could recognise individual letters and understand spoken conversations, but I couldn’t speak or read. All my basic limb coordination had been lost. I had to re-learn everything from scratch.”

“After seven days I was discharged from hospital. I still had very slow and limited speech. At home a Community Occupational Therapist and Speech Therapist visited me four times a week for the first couple of months. Once those visits stopped, I was on my own. That’s when I started getting support from Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke.”

Kim attended our Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP), a physiotherapy led, community-based course which helps rebuild people’s lives 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.

"At first, I was nervous about going to PREP because I thought most people would be elderly, but they weren't. PREP really helped me improve my motor skills, but it also provided great peer support. After the exercise session we would chat about care plans, everyday routines, and our coping strategies for living with stroke. It was a massive aid to my recovery to hear that other people were in the same boat as me."

Thankfully Kim continued positively on her recovery journey, including getting back to work as a driving instructor. She didn't forget the help and support she received from NICHHS however and was determined to use what happened to her for something positive and decided to become a volunteer at PREP. Kim explains; "PREP helped me to get back on my feet and I wanted to pass on some of my experiences to help other stroke survivors."

"I lost so much confidence after my stroke. I had difficulties with my speech, and I had a few bad experiences in shops and even in the doctor's surgery. If someone was rushing me or putting pressure on me, I found it even more difficult and I couldn't speak at all so I would have just left, often in tears. After a few incidences like that I just wouldn't go out, I was a hermit. PREP really helped me regain my confidence and sharing my experiences with others who understood really helped. I wanted to be able to do that for other people by becoming a PREP volunteer."

Kim is also keen to share her experience of how exercise has helped her on her post-stroke recovery journey and inspire others to exercise more. "The doctors did lots of tests after my stroke and couldn't find any medical reason as to why it happened. I found that difficult to process. If I had of been suffering from high blood pressure or high cholesterol, I could have done something to try and tackle that, but there was nothing I could apparently do to try and reduce my risk of having another stroke. I couldn't 'fix' anything and I struggled with that."

"The only issue I could think of was that as a driving instructor my job is sedentary, and I could have been more active previously. Now I exercise every day- I walk the dog, I go to the gym regularly and I swim. Exercise is really important to me, and



it is something I would encourage others to try and do more of as the benefits are plentiful. It not only helps me physically but also mentally. It gives me peace of mind that I am doing something to reduce my risk of having another stroke."

Kim was also inspired to help NICHHS further by becoming an Ambassador for the charity which has involved speaking at conferences and events to raise awareness of stroke, collecting cheques from local fundraisers, volunteering at fundraising events, and much more. Kim explains; "In my role as an Ambassador for NICHHS I can talk to people and tell them about my stroke, about how the charity helped me, how the money they have fundraised will help other local people and so on. I can raise awareness of young stroke and thrombectomy which is important to me. As a society we tend to think stroke is something that only affects older people and that needs to change. It can happen to anyone, at any age and stage in life."

"If I am ever nervous about doing something as an Ambassador I think, 'You were given a second chance at a voice. Take it.'"

If her volunteer and ambassador roles weren't enough Kim also fundraises for NICHHS. "I have taken part in the Red Dress Fun Run numerous times which is always great fun. I am part of a cold-water swimming group, the Killyleagh Dippers & Strippers, and we are planning a cold-water swim fundraiser for NICHHS to mark eight years since my stroke. On the actual anniversary, 22nd February, I climbed Slieve Bearnagh which took over five hours so that was quite the challenge!"

Kim concludes; **"NICHHS helped me so much and I can't recommend them enough. In that time when I was so low, they were there. That's why I want to try and give back and make a difference."**










Thank you

to everyone who supported us in 2024/2025

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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