

# Pulse

Autumn 2024



**From being unable to walk to walking on fire to raise over £18,000 for NICHS - Jennie's stroke story**

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**Learn about the difference we made in 2023/2024**

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**A spotlight on Heart Failure**

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**Can a diabetes drug be used to treat pulmonary fibrosis?**

**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke**



## Survivor Story



### Jennie Wallace STROKE

**Jennie Wallace, from Belfast, suffered an unexpected stroke in February last year at just 41 years old. Jennie's life changed overnight but thanks to her determination and hard work, Jennie recovered well and wanted to use what happened to her for something positive. Jennie recently organised a fire walk fundraiser in aid of Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke which raised an incredible £18,265, as well as much needed awareness of young stroke.**

Jennie explains;

**"I had my stroke on 15th February 2023. I was in the shower when I felt funny, and my balance went. I called my husband, Jonathan, because I knew something wasn't right, and he came up and got me out of the shower. I was lying on the floor vomiting, and I couldn't open my eyes. He called an ambulance, and paramedics came. I didn't really have the typical stroke symptoms, but they seemed to realise quickly what was happening. I was taken by ambulance to the Ulster Hospital and received the clot busting drug Thrombolysis."**

"I was then taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital for a Thrombectomy which is a procedure to remove blood clots and help restore blood flow to the brain. I was in the Royal for around ten days. Then I came home and started rebuilding my life."

Being just 41 years old, a busy mum to a young daughter, and the owner of Beyond Skin Clinic in Belfast, Jennie was used to always being on the go and found the impact of her stroke difficult to cope with. Jennie says, "I had to learn how to walk again and needed a stick. My left arm and shoulder were badly affected. I was impacted cognitively too, and my processing skills were slower."

"The fatigue was a killer. There were things I thought I could do, but then I would be knocked out for three days in bed. It was so hard when my daughter Cleo was asking me, 'Mummy can we go for a walk', and I had to say, 'I'm really sorry, I can't, my legs are too tired'. That was awful and I hated it."

Jennie set about researching what support was available for stroke survivors post their statutory rehab, which is when she came across Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke. Jennie recalls; "I went along to NICH's Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP) group at Lisnasharragh. PREP is a physiotherapy led, community-based course which focuses on exercise and education, and I found it to be really useful."

**“When I first went, I was really quite low, and my physical side hadn’t come on a lot. The NICHS staff were kind, helpful and so encouraging. I was putting in the work and seeing improvements, and by the end of it, my walking had improved so much, my posture improved, my attitude improved. It was definitely the best thing I did in terms of rehab.”**

Jennie found the help and support she received from NICHS so great she was keen to give something back. “I’ve always wanted to do a fire walk. After I learnt to walk again following my stroke, I really wanted to do something to support NICHS and the idea of, now that I’ve learnt to walk, I’m going to learn to walk on fire, just seemed really cool to me!”

“Obviously, I didn’t know how to walk on fire so I worked with someone who could support me with the logistical side of running the event. I have quite a large network of business contacts and I reached out to them, asking if they would like to send a team to do the fire walk as a team building exercise. I had support on the PR side of things to raise awareness and my friend, Gerardette McGivern from Happy Feet Podiatry, kindly offered her venue for the event. Before I knew it, I had 70 people signed up!”

Talking about the fire walk, Jennie says, “I was the first person to do the walk on the night- everybody was chanting for me to do it!”

**“After I did it, I felt amazing. I have been walking with a stick since my stroke but that was the first day in over a year that I didn’t use it. I walked across without my stick and was really proud of myself. To have come that far, from not being able to walk, to walking on fire was such an achievement.”**

Jennie also draws a parallel between the event and the support offered by NICHS, saying, “Everybody was cheering and encouraging each other and that was very in line with how things are at the PREP groups. Just like at PREP, we were only in competition with ourselves and were willing everyone on to do their own best. At the PREP groups everybody’s situation is different, but everyone is pulling towards the same goal

and that’s really what it was like at the fire walk too.”

The event was a huge success, raising a phenomenal £18,265. Jennie comments; “I am delighted to have raised so much money to help NICHS continue to support local people affected by devastating health conditions. I couldn’t have done it without those other 70 people and everyone who supported the event so I would like to thank them for all their efforts.”

It is not just funds that have been raised however, it is also stroke awareness. Jennie explains; “It is important for me to share my story and I have been talking about recovery and things a little bit on social media to my networks because people are coming back and thanking me for sharing and they are interested in my recovery. I think because of my age and the fact I had no warning signs people are interested.”

**“In my case, I had no underlying health issues. I’m not a smoker, I don’t drink excessively, I’m not a drug taker. Stroke and other kinds of illnesses were just not on my radar. Even when my stroke was happening, I didn’t know what it was. It was only after I woke up post-surgery and noticed a sign on the wall saying, ‘Stroke Ward’ and I thought, ‘What? Have I had a stroke?!’ I want to make people aware a stroke can happen to anyone, at any age. I feel like I have an obligation to share my story and if it helps others that’s great.”**

**For more information on NICHS stroke services, visit [nichs.org.uk/stroke-support](https://nichs.org.uk/stroke-support)**



# Are you up for a challenge?

Whether you want to run, walk, jump, row, bike or hike, we would love you to join #TeamNICHs and help us continue the fight against chest, heart and stroke conditions in Northern Ireland.

If you don't see anything you like below, get in touch and we can talk about some other ideas.

Download a copy of our fundraising guide at [www.nichs.org.uk/fundraisingguide](http://www.nichs.org.uk/fundraisingguide)



## Check out our 2024/25 autumn and winter events calendar below and get signed up!

### Twilight Hearty Hike

Sat 7 September



### Walk to Remember

Sun 8 September



### Europa Abseil

Sun 15 September



### Run To Remember

#### Loughgall 5K

Sun 29 September



### Run In The Dark Belfast

Wed 13 November



### Red Dress

#### Fun Run 2025

Sun 23 February



### Belfast City

#### Marathon 2025

Sun 4 May



Almost **90%** of our income comes from public donations.

For more information or to sign up:

[www.nichs.org.uk/events](http://www.nichs.org.uk/events)

E: [events@nichs.org.uk](mailto:events@nichs.org.uk)

T: +44 (0)28 9032 0184

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Registered with  
FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke



## TOBACCO AND VAPING

**The Tobacco and Vaping Bill introduced by the Conservative government in March would have prohibited the sale of tobacco to people born on or after 1 January 2009 – a radical move in the battle against smoking. The Bill also included restrictions on the flavours and colours used in vaping products as it is feared these are being used to market vapes to children.**

The calling of the General Election meant this Bill did not become law. The Labour and Conservative parties, however, are both committed to introducing a similar Bill in the new Parliament. We urged all candidates in the General Election to support the measures outlined in the Tobacco and Vaping Bill and will be asking all our newly elected MPs to back a new Bill when the new government brings one forward. If you get a chance to engage with your MP, please urge them to support a new Tobacco and Vaping Bill.

The Assembly also has a role to play to in regulating tobacco and vaping. The UK government signalled a desire to ban disposable vapes – not least because they are being used to market vaping to young people. The easiest way to do this, however, is via environmental legislation, given the littering and waste disposal/recycling issues they present. Andrew Muir, the Agriculture and Environment Minister at Stormont, has committed to bringing forward legislation by April 2025. Clearly, we will be urging MLAs to support this.

NICHS believes that the Assembly can, and should, do more. We need to combat the huge surge in young people who have taken up vaping and are at risk of becoming addicted to nicotine.

Last year it became illegal to sell vapes to young people under 18, however, there is strong anecdotal evidence that enforcement is difficult.

Enforcement is difficult because rogue retailers are simply willing to 'take the hit' of a fine rather than desist from making sales to children. Furthermore, there is currently no way for council enforcement staff to know who is selling vapes, for example, taxi offices, hairdressers and other non-traditional retailers are free to sell vapes. Essentially it is a free for all.

There is a register of retailers selling tobacco following Assembly legislation in 2014. This enables council enforcement staff to know which premises are legally selling tobacco. It also enables retailers who break the law regularly to be removed from the register. In other words, rogue traders face losing their permission to sell tobacco.

NICHS is urging the Assembly to require vaping retailers to register in a similar manner. Given the increasing concerns about the cardiovascular and respiratory health risks associated with vaping, Assembly Members need to act. Should you have an opportunity to engage with any MLAs, please do urge them to support both the banning of disposables and the creation of a vaping retailers register.



# Corporate Supporters

## CORPORATES WHO CARE

### HELPING CREATE HAPPY HEARTS

We are delighted to have developed a new partnership with the Fane Valley Group for 2024/25. Fane Valley's 'Happy Hearts' group charity partnership is supporting the work of our charity as well as the Irish Heart Foundation. Speaking at the partnership launch, Fane Valley Group Chief Executive, Trevor Lockhart MBE, said: "We are thrilled to launch 'Happy Hearts' and to work with NICHS and the Irish Heart Foundation. We feel that both organisations naturally complement each other and relate to all staff regardless of where they work across the business. We look forward to building a calendar of activities and events for our teams across the Group, as we seek to engage, educate and fundraise to support these worthy causes. We are also keen to build awareness of healthy habits we can all adopt to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke."



### SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT

We are excited to have Bazaarvoice as a new NICHS corporate partner. Bazaarvoice provide software that allows brands and retailers to find and reach consumers and share authentic user-generated content. Thank you to Bazaarvoice for choosing us as their new charity partner.



### TESCO TRIBUTE TO MUCH-LOVED TEAM MEMBER

Inspired by wanting to help their local community in tribute to a much-loved friend and colleague, Linda Owens, a team from Tesco Carrickfergus undertook various fundraising initiatives in aid of our charity such as a staff raffle, in-store collection day, and an arduous 16-mile walk from Carrickfergus Castle to Belfast, and back! They raised a fantastic £4,721- our heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported us in Linda's memory. To find out more about setting up a tribute page to fundraise in memory for NICHS, [visit nichs.org.uk/tribute](https://nichs.org.uk/tribute)



### A-MACE-ING

Our long-term partner, MACE, have smashed their previous annual fundraising totals raising an amazing £56,967. MACE stores have gone above and beyond, hosting static cycles, pop up blood pressure checks, and participating in our Red Dress Fun Run.

Our top ten MACE fundraising stores have also been chosen to trial a new donate tag. These tags will allow customers to tap and easily donate to our charity using Google Pay or Samsung Pay on their phones.



To find out more about how your business or organisation can partner with us, visit [nichs.org.uk/fundraiseatwork](https://nichs.org.uk/fundraiseatwork)



**We are delighted to be funding 4 new research projects this year. Read on to find out more about these exciting studies.**

### **SUPPORTING STROKE SURVIVORS TO BE ACTIVE LONG-TERM**

Physical activity after a stroke can boost recovery, but people are often left with health issues that make it harder to be active. Our Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP) helps people get active after their stroke, but it is a six-week programme. The problem is maintaining activity levels once PREP is finished.

We have funded Dr Katy Pedlow at Ulster University to develop a programme, with the support of stroke survivors, that will help them stay active long-term. If this research is successful, we will be able to offer stroke survivors a structured way of maintaining their recovery journey long after they have completed PREP.

### **HELPING STROKE SURVIVORS IMPROVE THEIR ARM FUNCTION**

8 out of 10 stroke survivors will experience arm weakness due to brain injury. Although this brain damage cannot be 'cured', the brain is resilient, and function can be recovered. Previous research suggests that motor imagery training, which involves imagining moving the arm, has the potential to help stroke survivors improve arm function. Dr Kathy Ruddy, at Queen's University Belfast, has designed a computer game that teaches the user to change their brain activity. We have funded Dr Ruddy to test whether this game helps improve arm function.

### **CAN A DIABETES DRUG BE USED TO TREAT PULMONARY FIBROSIS?**

Pulmonary Fibrosis (PF) is a lung disease that causes scarring, making it harder for the lungs to work properly. The cause of PF is not clear. Dr Bettina Schock, from Queen's University Belfast,

thinks that fibroblasts, cells that repair our tissue, are constantly 'switched on', contributing to the scarring. A protein called HE4 looks like it keeps the fibroblasts switched on.

Dr Schock has already shown in the lab that a diabetes drug, Dapagliflozin, reduces the amount of HE4 in cells, which reduces inflammation and scarring. We have funded Dr Schock to test whether the drug could be a new treatment for PF, for which effective treatments are urgently needed.

### **BABY HEARTS 2**

Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) is a range of heart conditions that babies are born with. In most cases, no obvious reason can be identified. Understanding the factors involved is vital, and that is why we funded the Baby Hearts project in 2013.

We are now funding Professor Frank Casey, from Ulster University, to go back to the babies in the original study to see how they are developing. This study is exciting because often in research we don't get the chance to follow up with the same group of people. Being able to do so allows us to build up a more accurate picture of how CHD affects these children. We hope the findings can be used to ensure services meet their needs, and to improve guidance given to those planning to have a family.



# Care Services



## ELEVATING SERVICES TO NEW HEIGHTS

At Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke, our Care Services department offers a range of support services for people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions. We work with people of all ages throughout Northern Ireland, along with their families and caregivers.

We understand the huge impact that living with a chest, heart or stroke illness can have on you and on your loved ones. Whatever your situation, you can rest assured that NICHS is on hand to help you – every step of the way.

One of the pillars of work within the Care department is our health improvement programmes. These programmes bring together people living with a long-term health condition and provide them with health improvement information in an environment which encourages connection and sharing lived experience. We have three condition specific education programmes:

- ✓ **Breathing Better Education Programme**  
- respiratory specific
- ✓ **Heart Strong Education Programme**  
- heart specific
- ✓ **Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP)** - stroke specific

All our health improvement programmes are research informed and have been developed with the needs of those living with chest, heart and stroke conditions in mind. All our programmes are regularly evaluated to ensure they we are offering a high-quality service and that we are achieving the best outcomes for our service users.

While each programme is specifically tailored to a condition (chest, heart or stroke), there are similar themes which run throughout all programmes. Firstly, we provide health information that is focused on secondary prevention messages. This means that we deliver information on what you can do to reduce your risk of being diagnosed with a long-term health condition. These messages focus on topics such as healthy eating, exercise, stress management, and how to make positive lifestyle changes. These prevention messages also help those living with a long-term health condition to better manage their condition and ensure they have the information they need to live a healthy lifestyle.





When we asked our service users for their feedback on our programmes, we were constantly told that the peer support element was one of the most beneficial parts of the services. Our service users enjoy meeting others with a similar diagnosis, but it was the sharing of lived experience and learning from others that they found invaluable. As a direct result of this feedback, we have ensured peer support is focused on in all our services. We encourage conversation, discussion and sharing to help reduce isolation, build connections, and foster open communication at each group.

**This year the Care Services department is aiming to reach even more people than before. No matter where you live in Northern Ireland there will be an education programme in operation to meet your needs.**

**To find out more, visit [nichs.org.uk/support](https://nichs.org.uk/support)**



## **ADVICE SPACE HELP NICHS SERVICE USERS CLAIM OVER £1,000,000**

Advice Space, formerly known as Citizens Advice, provides support and guidance and helps people to exercise their rights and obtain fair treatment under the law. Our Care Services team have been working with Advice Space since 2018. Advice Space helps support our service users across a broad range of issues including housing, employment, consumer issues and benefits.

We have recently received the latest information regarding the amount of financial help Advice Space has assisted NICHS service users claim.

**Since March 2020,  
the figure stands  
at an amazing**



**£1,419,045.20!**

We are delighted at the help this partnership has delivered to our service users and look forward to helping many more in the future.

**advice  
space**  
support & guidance

**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke**

# Heart Failure Q&A



We are launching a heart failure public awareness campaign on the 26th August. We want to inform everyone what heart failure is, what the symptoms are and advise how people can get help or support.

Here, **Edith Donnelly, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Heart Failure, Southern Health & Social Care Trust**, explains more about heart failure.

## WHAT IS HEART FAILURE?

Heart failure is a medical condition where 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 (squeeze) and relax. Heart failure happens when the heart does not contract or relax as well as it should.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEART FAILURE, HEART ATTACK AND CARDIAC ARREST?

It is common for people to get heart failure, a heart attack and a cardiac arrest mixed up, but they are three very different things. As already described, heart failure is when the pumping function of the heart is reduced because it does not squeeze or relax properly. A heart attack is caused by coronary heart disease. This is when there is a narrowing in one or more of the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle. This causes the blood supply to the heart to be cut off and can cause damage to the heart muscle. A cardiac arrest is when the heart suddenly stops beating, leading to a sudden collapse. The person will be unconscious and will need CPR.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEART FAILURE?

The main symptoms of heart failure are shortness of breath, tiredness and fluid retention. These symptoms happen because the heart is no longer able to pump enough blood round the body to meet all of its needs. You might notice that you can't 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 tummy start to swell.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE ANY OF THE SYMPTOMS OF HEART FAILURE?

If you have any of these symptoms you should contact your GP as soon as possible. This is important because if you do have heart failure, the sooner it is diagnosed the sooner you can get started on the correct treatment and get the right care.

## HOW IS HEART FAILURE DIAGNOSED?

The first step is to get a blood test called a BNP. This will let your GP know if the heart is under any strain. If this test is abnormal, they will refer you to hospital for you to get an echocardiogram. This is a scan of the heart that checks the pumping function of the heart. It also looks at how well the heart valves are working. This test is usually done as an outpatient. If the results of the scan show a problem with the pumping function or the valves, a referral will be made to a local heart failure team to have treatment started.

## HOW IS HEART FAILURE TREATED AND HOW DO HEART FAILURE PATIENTS GET CARED FOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

When the diagnosis of heart failure is confirmed, patients will be referred to their local heart failure team. This team usually includes a consultant cardiologist and heart failure specialist nurses who are experts in managing this condition. The team will start medication to protect the heart function, improve symptoms and get rid of fluid build-up. These medications are a very important part of heart failure treatment, and it usually takes a few appointments to get them all started. The team will also give advice about how to monitor symptoms, manage fluid intake and what to do if symptoms get worse. Keeping active is an important part of managing heart failure, and the heart failure team might consider a referral to a local cardiac rehabilitation service for specialist advice and support about this. Having a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight, stopping smoking and limiting alcohol intake are also very important, and it is recommended that all patients living with heart failure have their seasonal vaccinations.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF HEART FAILURE IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

Raising public awareness about heart failure is vital. We know there are likely to be people out there living with undiagnosed, untreated heart failure. Left untreated, heart failure symptoms get progressively worse, cause poor quality of life and lead to admission to hospital. If we can educate the public about heart failure, the symptoms of heart failure and what to do if they think they might have heart failure, we can get people accurately diagnosed and referred for specialist treatment, care and support, regardless of age.



## LEAVING A GIFT OF HOPE

**Have you ever thought how you can continue to make a difference to hundreds of lives in the future? Leaving a gift to NICHS in your will is a wonderful way to do just that. It's more than just a donation; it's a lasting gift and a personal legacy to reflect your support of a cause you care about.**

Gifts left in wills (charitable bequests) can have a huge impact on the people we support, services we supply, and research we fund. They help us plan long-term projects, expand our services, and secure our financial stability.

Planning for the future can seem daunting, but it's an important conversation to have. If you are thinking of leaving a gift in your will to NICHS, we encourage you to discuss your plans with family members and a solicitor to ensure your wishes are clearly understood and legally documented.

There are practical financial benefits when writing your will too, as UK charitable bequests are exempt from inheritance tax. This can reduce the overall tax burden on your estate meaning more of your money is protected and stays in your estate.

Leaving a gift to NICHS in your will can provide us with essential support to carry out our work, and enables you to leave a meaningful, enduring personal legacy.

If you are interested in making your will online, we have partnered with Bequeathed who can help you make your will. Simple wills are usually free of charge. Please go to [www.bequeathed.org/nichs](http://www.bequeathed.org/nichs) for further details.

Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

## Leave a lasting legacy.

**Hope** is the best gift you could leave in your will to **support Stroke survivors in Northern Ireland.**

Your gift could give hope to regain independence, mobility and rebuild lives after stroke through our Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP).

Please consider leaving a gift to NICHS in your will. After caring for family and friends, you could make a profound difference by ensuring we can be there for those who need us today, tomorrow and in the years to come.



Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke

Visit [nichs.org.uk/giftsinwills](http://nichs.org.uk/giftsinwills) to find out more, call us on **028 90 266 743** or email [supportercare@nichs.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@nichs.org.uk)

# Survivor Story



## Geraldine Sayee BRONCHIECTASIS

**Respiratory illnesses are often misunderstood, with many people unaware of the devastating impact they can have on the people living with them. People like Geraldine Sayee who has Bronchiectasis, a long-term condition where the airways of the lungs become widened, leading to a build-up of excess mucus that can make the lungs more vulnerable to infection.**

Geraldine was active with a career she loved in global pharmaceutical sales, when in August 2020 she started to feel unwell.

**“It started when my sister was visiting me, and she commented that my coughing and breathing were very bad and advised I should go to the doctor.”**

“I visited the Out of Hours service where I tested positive for COVID-19. I was given an antibiotic as I was short of breath but unfortunately, this offered little respite. My cough had intensified to the point of nausea. I wasn’t eating and was unusually tired.” Geraldine then went to see her own GP and was started on a course of stronger antibiotics and steroids. Geraldine continued to

feel unwell and within weeks had lost her voice due to inflammation of her vocal cords

Geraldine decided to get a second opinion through her private healthcare plan: “In January 2021 I attended an appointment with a respiratory consultant. Following several tests including a CT scan I was diagnosed with Bronchiectasis.”

She was treated with the mucolytic drug Carbocisteine, additional steroids, given a nebulizer and inhaler, and her life changed dramatically. “I was due back at work, but I just wasn’t well enough. The cough was really getting me down because I couldn’t sleep. I was both physically and mentally fatigued – when you are used to being very active and healthy, adjusting to a life-changing condition is most challenging.”

Geraldine took early retirement, struggling to manage low energy levels and a cough which impacted her once very full social life. “I couldn’t walk far, and I was embarrassed by my coughing because COVID-19 was still around.”

Six months after her diagnosis, Geraldine was referred to the respiratory multi-disciplinary team at Belfast City Hospital, where the help available from Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke was highlighted.



**“I called NICHS and spoke to Gemma, one of the Care Services Co-ordinators. Gemma was such a support. She talked me through the condition, and then I started attending meetings which were online due to COVID-19. Eventually we were able to meet up in person and I attended the Breathing Better Education Programme.”**

Geraldine then attended our Taking Control Self-Management Programme. “This completely lifted my spirits. It was empowering to be with people dealing with similar health issues. We developed support networks and lasting friendships. NICHS returned light to my life.”

Speaking about the impact of Bronchiectasis, Geraldine says; “It really knocked me, for somebody who had been so confident. I’ve been widowed for 14 years, but I was always in control and able to manage. After my husband died, I threw myself into work. I travelled a lot, but I haven’t been able to travel for almost 4 years now. I hadn’t planned to retire before 70 because I was very active and fit. I loved my job. But all of that was taken away.”

“I also have two grandsons who love running around at the park, but I can’t do that anymore. Before I developed this condition, they would regularly sleep over at my house, but that had to stop. They would get distressed when I started coughing because they are very afraid of something happening to me. I miss them staying over terribly.”

“In the winter, I can’t really go out after teatime, because of the effects of going out in the cold. It is rather embarrassing if you succumb to a coughing fit in a restaurant, and if you’ve eaten sometimes the coughing makes you feel sick. It is very debilitating, but you wouldn’t know it looking at any of us with Bronchiectasis.”

“Respiratory illnesses are completely misunderstood. People don’t realise the impact it has on your daily life. I can’t get up and get going quickly in the mornings. I’ve got to take my time, do my nebulizer, take my Carbocysteine tablets, then try to expel the mucus and take my inhalers. I must perform this daily ritual just to function. This condition has changed my life dramatically.”

Geraldine bravely spoke about her experiences at the launch of NICHS’s Respiratory Manifesto at Stormont in September last year, urging politicians here to make changes to help those affected by respiratory conditions: “I supported NICHS’s Respiratory Manifesto because I would love to be able to shout from the rooftops about their work, to raise awareness about their services for people who need it. I’m just trying to help those people who have a similar illness, so they don’t feel they are on their own.”

**“In my experience, you are very much left on your own by the system after diagnosis. I get six monthly appointments to follow up at the hospital. Unless I am admitted to hospital for a flare up, there is nothing else they can really do. NICHS’s services are like a bridge between primary and secondary care. Respiratory illnesses are looked upon as something that the hospital deals with when you reach a certain threshold. NICHS is there to help you with managing day to day and proactively preventing flare ups.”**

“This experience has reinforced my long-held belief that with every cloud there is a silver lining. For me that shimmering thread is NICHS! Without their support my cloud would be so much heavier and my life, potentially a lot darker. They are wonderful.”

**For more information on NICHS chest support services, visit [nichs.org.uk/chest-support](https://nichs.org.uk/chest-support)**

**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke**

# Impact 2023/2024

## THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

To help us achieve our vision of a healthy Northern Ireland free from chest, heart and stroke illnesses, it's important that we measure the impact of the work we do. This allows us to see what's really making a difference, helping us to focus our attention on key areas, while improving others, so we can deliver the most effective services and outcomes.

The next few pages highlight the effectiveness of our programmes, services and research projects over the past year. To find out more about our impact you can read our Annual Impact Report which will be available on our website in the coming weeks. Visit [nichs.org.uk/about-us/impact](https://nichs.org.uk/about-us/impact) to read the report in full.

## CARE IMPACT

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 by our  
Care Service programmes.

**Number of people we supported, with "chest", "heart", & "stroke" as their main condition, and their carers:**



## FAMILY SUPPORT

**1,882 people benefitted from our Family Support service. They said...**

**96%**  
felt listened to and supported

**96%**  
were confident managing their condition

**96%**  
felt confident accessing support

**83%**  
felt less isolated

## STROKE SUPPORT

**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

**77%** improved their walking speed

**88%** showed an improvement in balance and mobility

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

**80%** reported an improvement in wellbeing

**2/3** The number of people with probable clinical depression dropped by two thirds



## RESPIRATORY SUPPORT

# 149

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

**People felt more confident after taking part in our Breathing Better Education Programme:**

**100%**  
were more confident managing their condition

**91%**  
reported being more active

**100%**  
felt more in control of their general health

## RESEARCH IMPACT



**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

## POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS IMPACT



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



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



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 important of prevention and pressed the Minister for Health on the failure to drive forward with the Stroke Action Plan.



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.



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.

## FUNDRAISING IMPACT

Almost 90% of our care and prevention services and research are funded exclusively thanks to public donations.

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



**£3.95 million**  
raised through public donations



**3,279**  
regular givers



**112**  
companies funded for us



**417**  
community fundraising events organised across NI



**1,116**  
supporters took part in events and challenges

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke

## HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION IMPACT

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.

# 31,260

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

## HEALTH PROMOTION IN SCHOOLS



# 18,168

pupils, parents and teachers benefitted from our schools programmes

**87** schools and community organisations

### Chester's Challenge Programme (Primary)

# 1,708

took part in the Chester's Challenge Programme



## Well Talks (Post-Primary)

# 15,462

students, teachers, parents, and youth workers took part

# 42

schools and organisations

# 99

Well Talks

# 92%

of people (14,233) received a talk about vaping

## HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE WORKPLACE

**WORK WELL** **LIVE WELL**

A Public Health Agency initiative

# 3,647

employees benefitted

# 131

Health Champions trained

# 224

attended learning events

## WELL CHECKS

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.

# 9,000

people received checks

# 25%

referred for help with high blood pressure

# 12%

referred for help with high cholesterol

# 2,925

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



## COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

**Community groups not only play an integral role in raising vital funds to support our work but also increase awareness of the work that Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke does within their local area.**

Whether it's a tractor run through the town, a Captain's day at your golf club, or a challenge walk up Croagh Patrick, there are so many ways to come together and help people affected by chest, heart and stroke illnesses. Whatever activity you love to do could help us change lives!



Many groups choose to support us in memory of a member or friend, or know someone in their community who has been affected by a chest, heart or stroke related condition. Groups just like the organisers of the McCarthy's Farm tractor run and barn dance in Lisbane, Kircubbin, who fundraised a phenomenal amount of £23,622 in memory of a much-loved member of the Ards peninsula community David Lemon, and O'Connells GAC, Tullysaran, who climbed Croagh Patrick in memory of Fr. Brian White and raised an incredible £6,162.



Or Castlereagh Hills Golf Club who chose us as their charity of the year last year. The whole club supported us through Captain's days, a President's day, a coffee morning, and a quiz, raising a fantastic £3,000.



Would your group or organisation consider organising an event or choosing us as your charity of the year to help us raise the £3 million that is needed each year to provide our vital care services across Northern Ireland? Every group is assigned a dedicated Community Relationship Manager who will provide you with all the assistance, guidance, and fundraising materials you need to make your event a truly successful occasion and charity partnership. To find out more, please visit [nichs.org.uk/fundraise](http://nichs.org.uk/fundraise)

**To become one of our Community Champions, please contact [communityfundraising@nichs.org.uk](mailto:communityfundraising@nichs.org.uk), or telephone 028 9032 0184 during office hours and ask to speak to a member of the Community Fundraising team.**



# Prevention Services



## 'MANAGING YOUR ASTHMA' ONLINE COURSE

Having asthma is more serious than most people think. Shockingly, every 10 seconds someone in the UK has a potentially life-threatening asthma attack (Public Health England 2023), and on average 38 people die every year in Northern Ireland alone of an asthma attack. Unfortunately, many of these deaths could have been prevented if more people knew how to use their asthma inhalers correctly. Did you know that only 20% of those who suffer from asthma know how to take their inhaler correctly? (Kings College London)

Clinicians tell us they see a rise in the number of young people with asthma being admitted to hospital in September. Often this is because young people have changed their routines during the school holidays, and in some cases young people may be taking control of their medication for the first time. This is why Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke has collaborated with asthma clinician Dr Dara O'Donoghue, Specialist Asthma Nurses Barbara Maxwell, Catherine Russell and Gillian Gallagher from the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, and our Charity Trustee, Professor Mike Shields, to develop an expert led 'Effective Asthma Management' online course which is targeted at young people. This free, interactive, online course is available to schools and GP surgeries across Northern Ireland.

### **Barbara Maxwell, Gillian Gallager and Catherine Russell,**

Specialist Asthma Nurses, pictured at the comic-inspired artwork we created for the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children's Asthma Clinic. The aim of the artwork is to reinforce the messages of what children, and parents/carers, can do to try and manage their asthma effectively.

The course is designed to empower young people aged 11-21 years old to develop the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to confidently navigate life with asthma. Participants will learn:

- What asthma is and why it must be taken seriously
- How to identify and manage triggers
- How to use your personalised action plan for better symptom control
- Proper inhaler usage including step-by-step video guides
- What to do in an asthma attack

**If you are interested in our 'Managing Your Asthma' online course, please visit [nichs.org.uk/asthmaonlinecourse](https://nichs.org.uk/asthmaonlinecourse). Further information about asthma, including a factsheet, access to the asthma edition of our Heart to Heart podcast, and a recording of our asthma online clinic can be found at [nichs.org.uk/asthma-can-kill](https://nichs.org.uk/asthma-can-kill)**





# Supporters

## SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE?

**Any special occasion can be made extra enchanting by knowing that you will be giving us the precious gift of helping support people with chest, heart and stroke illnesses and saving lives across Northern Ireland.**

'Donating in celebration' couldn't be easier. Simply ask your family, friends, and work colleagues to make a donation to NICHs instead of buying you a gift via your own personal celebration fundraising page which we will happily set up for you. They can also upload a photo and a personal message, no need for a card, as your page will collect their thoughts and best wishes all in one special place, which is yours to keep and visit forever.

If it is your wedding day, we also offer wedding favours through our online shop at [nichs.org.uk/shop](http://nichs.org.uk/shop)

You don't need to do a thing except enjoy your special occasion as all donations will come directly to us. Plus, as long as we have their contact details, we will send a thank you message to everyone who sends us a gift, thanks to you.

Every year, chest, heart and stroke conditions claim thousands of lives across Northern Ireland, while many more people live with these conditions on a daily basis. Our services are a lifeline to many of these people and with your help, we can keep providing the support they need.

**For more information, visit [nichs.org.uk/how-you-can-help](http://nichs.org.uk/how-you-can-help)**



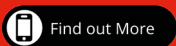
## Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

# Give a regular donation – make a lasting impact

Help us to be here **supporting local people and families living with life-changing illnesses** - today, tomorrow and for years to come.



Visit [www.nichs.org.uk/regulardonation](http://www.nichs.org.uk/regulardonation)



Charity Reg No. NIC 103593










**Almost 90%** of our income comes from public donations.

**Find out how you can support NICHs at [www.nichs.org.uk](http://www.nichs.org.uk)**



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We invest in people Gold