

Pulse

Issue 2 2025

**The difference our services
made in 2024/2025**

NICHS supporter stories

**How we are continuing
to tackle the issue of
youth vaping**

**A new NICHS caregivers
service**



**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Survivor Story



Myles O'Reilly STROKE

On Halloween night 2023, Myles O'Reilly suffered a bleed on his brain after an undiscovered blood clot burst. Terrifyingly, Myles could have lost his life. Thankfully, he survived and in February this year he took on our Red Dress Fun Run as a way of thanking NICHS for the support we gave him on his recovery journey.

Myles recalls; "I hadn't been feeling well for a few days. I thought some rest would help, so I went to bed but unfortunately, I ended up getting pneumonia. I was dehydrated, I wasn't up and moving, and I had some sort of infection. This led to the formation of a blood clot which then travelled to my brain. The clot burst, and I had a bleed on my brain."

"I was taken to hospital where scans confirmed the bleed. It came as a complete shock to me and my family. I was only 57 and was fit for my age. I thought I was immune to these sort of things happening being a healthy man. I never smoked, I was never overweight, I trained and ran a lot, but this crept through the defences and got me."

"I was in hospital for around four weeks. The biggest issue was I had left-hand peripheral vision deficit. I couldn't see the left-hand side of a page, where a sentence begins. I could read but I couldn't see that side. The Occupational Therapists at the hospital gave me exercises to do and I've always been an avid reader, so I read lots, and my kids got me optical vision games for my tablet. In my case, it was possible for my brain to compensate for the loss of the left-hand vision. I worked hard at it. I had a scan in May which showed my clot as stable, and I can now read."

"I used to play the mandolin, and I took that up again as another way to help as the chords are to the left, so I was forcing my eyes to focus on the left-hand side, and it helped retrain my brain."

"I would like to thank all the staff at the Royal Victoria Hospital Emergency Department. They saved my life and were so kind to my wife and family, and to me. Also, the staff in the Neurology department were fantastic. Without their help and care, my story could have been a lot different."

Once Myles was discharged from hospital, he was referred to Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke where his journey started with our Family Support service. Myles explains; "I was visited at home by one of NICHHS's Care Services Coordinators, Tracy, who was fantastic. She took the time to listen and understand my particular set of circumstances, so she could offer the personalised support I needed. She was able to give information and advice on living life with a stroke related condition as well as details about the NICHHS programmes I could attend."

"I attended the charity's Wellness Sessions at the Maureen Sheehan Centre in Belfast and those really helped. The sessions are all about secondary prevention, health promotion and emotional wellbeing and they also offer peer support. That aspect was particularly helpful to me because the doctors had explained I would end up getting depressed because it is the brain's natural reaction to something like what happened to me. There were other people at the group who had had strokes, and I realised I was not alone and that really helped me deal with the mental impact. There were also people living with worse side effects from their illness than me and that gave me some perspective too. I could see I came out the other side relatively well so to speak."

"Tracy was also able to reassure me that the things I was experiencing as part of my recovery, how I was feeling, was all completely to be expected and hearing that from somebody else, who has experience in this area and knows what they are talking about, was very reassuring."

"Tracy organised some sessions with a Personal Trainer to help me get back into training as I've always been active. That helped me realise I could go back to training again, but I needed to adapt it slightly. It gave me the confidence I needed as it was about learning how much was enough to push me on, but not too much."

"As I mentioned, the mental impact was big for me because after some time you realise what happened to you and how serious it was. I was having problems sleeping because I was afraid I wouldn't wake up again and I was getting to a dark place. Tracy organised some counselling sessions and those really helped me."

"Tracy was also able to provide practical support in terms of referring me for help with benefits I was entitled to because of my illness. I have never been out of work since I left school, so that was all totally new to me. There is a lot to try and navigate which is even harder when you are recovering from an illness. Tracy was always there to help and give advice."

As a thank you to NICHHS for the help and support he received Myles took part in our 2025 Red Dress Fun Run to raise both funds and awareness. "I decided to do the run as a thank you to NICHHS. They do so much great work and really helped me and my family."

"I did the Red Dress Fun Run with my daughter, and I was delighted we did it together. We trained together and it was great for me but also for my daughter to see her daddy getting back to being fighting fit."

"I have been through some tough times but my family, friends and NICHHS have helped me through. They have all been fantastic and I would like to thank everyone for their support."

For more information on NICHHS stroke services, visit nichs.org.uk/strokesupport

If you have been inspired by Myles' story, then why not step up to the challenge? The Red Dress Fun Run 2026 will take place on Sunday 22nd March 2026 so get the date in your diary now!

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Supporters

OUR HEARTFELT THANKS



CLIFTONVILLE INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOL

A big thank you to Cliftonville Integrated Primary School who did a sponsored walk fundraiser in aid of our work earlier this year as families within the school have been impacted by chest, heart and stroke related illnesses.

The school raised a fantastic £5,840, a really great achievement as they were hoping to raise £1,000 and smashed this target. Well done everyone!



ANDREW SMYTH

Andrew Smyth, from Carrickfergus, has been busy raising vital funds for our charity over recent months. Andrew decided he wanted to do something to support NICHHS after discovering he had heart failure last year.

Andrew is the Kit Manager for the Northern Ireland senior women, under-17s, 19s- and 21s-men football teams and is a big football fan himself so he organised a fundraising night with a focus on signed football shirts which was a great success. Andrew also held a ballot night with prizes donated from local businesses as well as a weekend fundraiser in Sainsbury's Carrickfergus.

All Andrew's hard work led to him donating a tremendous £7,000 to our charity. Thank you!



EGLINTON CLASSIC CAR CLUB

We were very fortunate to be chosen as Eglinton Classic Car Club's beneficiary for their Annual Static Show in 2024. The show raised a phenomenal £7,000 to support NICHHS services.

Eugene King is an NICHHS service user and his daughter, Karen, wrote to the club nominating our charity, detailing how our Post Rehab Exercise Programme and Surviving Stroke Wellness Sessions had greatly helped Eugene's post-stroke recovery journey. Eugene is pictured below (first row, far left) with Eglinton Classic Car Club members at the cheque presentation event.

A massive thank you to Eglinton Classic Car Club for all their hard work in raising this fantastic sum for our charity and to Karen and Eugene for nominating us!



STEPHEN BARR IN MEMORY FUNDRAISER

On the 30th of January Stephen Barr sadly suddenly passed away. Stephen was a local businessman and Watch Commander in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

Stephen's daughter, Stephanie, organised a golf day in memory of her dad to support NICHHS and Air Ambulance NI. The event was a great success, and the family also held a coffee morning and evening alongside the golf day.

An incredible £25,400 was raised and split between our charity and Air Ambulance NI. Our sincere heartfelt thanks go to Stephanie, Cindy (Stephen's wife), Jason (Stephen's son), Stevie Ward and Mark McCormick (Stephen's colleagues from Ballynahinch Fire Station) for this incredibly generous donation in memory of Stephen.



Our Schools and Public Affairs and Policy teams have been working extremely hard on the issue of young people and vaping for some time now. We have been campaigning around tobacco and vaping legislation and on the 1st of June we saw the ban on single use vapes come into force on environmental grounds. We continue to lobby for the registration of those selling vapes to come into line with the tobacco registration. There will be additional measures coming into effect in January 2027 around marketing and promotion restrictions, taxation, packaging and flavour restrictions. These new legislations are greatly needed as the Public Health Agency has reported that 15% of all young people now vape, with 4% of Year 8s and 46% of Year 14s currently saying they use vapes. The young people say that it has been normalised, it is seen as fun and looks cool, however, 40% have reported side effects such as breathlessness, coughing, nausea, increased stress and anxiety, and tiredness.

Our Well Schools team has worked with approximately 22,000 young people over the past year and most of this has been around vaping. Our Chester's Challenge P7 workshop and post-primary Well Talk, 'Know your risk: vaping', target young people to educate them about nicotine, addiction and the effects of vaping on our bodies. We know however that although these one-off workshops are great for increasing knowledge, we need a more encompassing programme. This has led us to carry out a teacher's survey which has shown there is a big appetite for a teaching resource to support our teachers and help them tackle the issue of vaping within their schools.

We considered what we could offer to fill this gap and came across Stanford University's evidenced-based vaping resource called, You and Me Together Vape Free. We are working with Stanford University to adapt this resource for use in Northern Ireland. Dr Bonnie Halpern Felsher and her colleague Holly Lung from Stanford University visited Northern Ireland in February to carry out pupil and teacher focus groups at Bangor Grammar, Kilkeel High School and St. Malachy's College, Belfast. We would like to thank these schools for their input as it has given us a deeper insight into how we can make the resource fit for purpose. The resource will include teacher training, a parent's educational resource, and three adaptations of the resource for Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 5.

We have also set up a steering group comprised of doctors, principals, teachers, and representatives from the Education Authority and Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). They will oversee and guide the work on this resource over the coming months, and we hope to launch the new You and Me Together Vape Free in September 2025.

For more information or to register for You and Me Together Vape Free, visit nichs.org.uk/youandmetogethervapefree

Corporate Supporters

MOVE MORE, LEARN MORE - EXPANDING CHESTER'S ACTIVE BREAKS ACROSS NI

Last year, we piloted the Chester's Active Breaks programme in ten schools across Northern Ireland to help tackle low physical activity levels here. Only 20% of primary pupils meet the daily 60-minute activity recommendation, the lowest rates in the UK.

Chester's Active Breaks is a 7-week challenge which encourages 2-3 daily active breaks to reduce sedentary time and improve pupils' wellbeing. After receiving positive feedback from the schools who participated in the pilot, we are delighted to announce we will be expanding the programme to more schools throughout September and October.

We are also excited to welcome Podium4Sport as this year's Chester's Active Breaks sponsor. Podium4Sport will be helping to promote the programme in-store and online and will kindly donate a £200 equipment voucher for the challenge winners!



Craig Allen, Podium4Sport
Marketing Manager and
Rakia Alouana, NICHS Schools
Health Promotion Officer.



Chris McCracken, Managing Director of Linen Quarter BID,
and Gareth McGleenon, NICHS Deputy CEO.

HEART OF THE QUARTER - NICHS AND LINEN QUARTER BID UNITE

NICHS's head office on the Dublin Road has been a cornerstone of the Linen Quarter in Belfast for 20 years so we are delighted to have been chosen as the Linen Quarter BID's (LQB) first charity partner. We will be working alongside LQB and its members to promote health awareness to all those living and working in this vibrant and historical part of Belfast.

Gareth McGleenon, NICHS Deputy CEO says; "We are pleased to have been selected by the BID as its first official charity partner, not only demonstrating the importance of our charity, but the importance of partnership and collaboration. We look forward to working with the LQ BID team to benefit and educate its members over the coming months, starting with a static cycling event at Belfast Grand Central Station on September 10th and a business breakfast on World Stroke Day on October 29th."

Our first fundraiser with Linen Quarter BID will be held at Grand Central Station on Wednesday 10th September. We will be inviting local workplaces to volunteer half an hour of their time to take a turn on our static cycle challenge so if you are in the area, please be sure to drop by!

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW SUPPORTERS

We are delighted to welcome the latest organisations joining us in our mission to prevent chest, heart and stroke conditions and support people affected. We are excited to have you on board!



AG Paving
& Building



Balmoral
Healthcare



Leprino
Foods



Podium
4Sport



B Secur



GMCG Chartered
Accountants



Mackie
Pet Foods



Propeller
Leasing



TEAM MUSGRAVE RUN IN MEMORY OF THEIR BELOVED COLLEAGUE CORRISA O'DOHERTY

We would like to congratulate the wonderful team from Musgrave who ran our Red Dress Fun Run 2025 in tribute to their much-loved colleague, Corrisa O'Doherty.

The team raised over £9,000 which is an amazing achievement. We are very grateful to everyone involved as almost 90% of our income comes from public donations, so fundraising efforts like this are vital to enable us to continue to support the local community and provide life-changing services.



COFFOLOGY AND NICHs - A BLEND OF GENEROSITY, VALUES AND LASTING CHANGE

For every coffee machine sold or rented, and every ingredient, from beans to milk, used, Coffology donates directly to NICHs. With our charity's logo proudly displayed on their cups and machines, Coffology are not just brewing great coffee, they are spreading awareness and fuelling health messages across Northern Ireland.

Coffology have become an integral part of the team here at NICHs. Alongside their ongoing donations, Daniel, Coffology Director, and his team have generously supported our annual

Red Dress Fun Run, providing refreshments to participants in exchange for contributions.

Coffology have also inspired their customers to get involved, joining forces with the team at Infinity Studio Belfast to raise an incredible £2,500 through their participation in this year's Belfast City Marathon.

Most recently Daniel has made a meaningful contribution to the Stroke Unit at Craigavon Area Hospital by donating a coffee machine, bringing a touch of home and comfort to the NICHs-branded waiting area for patients and their families.

Coffology are a shining example of how a corporate partnership can grow and flourish through shared values, goals and beliefs. Having already hit the amazing milestone of raising £10,000 for our work, we look forward with excitement to seeing where this partnership will take us next.

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Prevention Services



BRINGING NICHS HEALTH PROMOTION SERVICES TO BALLYMENA - A COMMUNITY EFFORT

Since October 2024, our Community Health Promotion team's Ballymena Well Community Programme has been striving to make a real difference to the lives of local people. This programme supports the health promotion priorities outlined in our strategic plan to bring high-quality, accessible health promotion services to underserved communities to contribute to health improvement and a reduction in health inequalities.

In just a few short months, the team has delivered over 500 health checks across key areas in Ballymena including Ballee, Ballykeel, Harryville, and the town centre. We identified these areas as being those most in need of our services through thorough research. In Ballee, 60% of those who attended our health checks were signposted to their GP, mostly for high blood pressure, and with treatment we have helped to prevent or delay the onset of an early stroke, heart attack and other conditions. The team was delighted to partner with Ballymena Tesco to offer monthly pop-up health checks and over 150 people have taken the opportunity to check in on their health - many for the first time.

We are also thrilled about our growing partnership with Diabetes UK. Together, we have delivered a 4-week group taster programme at the charity's Ballymena hub and are raising awareness of their vital services during our health checks.

These checks are more than just numbers. They are potentially changing lives and lifestyle behaviours. We have heard from local residents who, thanks to our health checks, were signposted to their GP and have since started treatment to manage their blood pressure. We are deeply grateful to the individuals and organisations of Ballymena who have welcomed us into their communities. To date, 14 local organisations have partnered with our programme, including 3 community groups who have taken part in our brand-new four-week health promotion taster sessions. These sessions are designed to be fun, engaging, and educational, covering topics like mindfulness, nutrition, physical activity, and managing risk factors. Many participants have gone on to join our Well You one year behaviour change programme, receiving one-to-one support that aims to empower people to improve their health by achieving their personal lifestyle behaviour change goals.

Karina Scott, NICHS's Senior Community Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, leads the Ballymena Well Community Programme with passion and dedication. She is hugely enthusiastic about the variety of services now available to Ballymena residents. One of Karina's highlights has been the rollout of the group taster sessions, especially the great response to Boccia, a gentle sport that is quickly becoming a community favourite. Karina even predicts a Ballymena Boccia league in the near future!

If you or your community group/organisation are based in Ballymena and are interested in finding out more about our Well Community Programme, please contact wellcommunity@nichs.org.uk

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

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Almost 90%
of our income
comes from
donations

Check out our events below and get signed up!

London Landmarks Half Marathon



Europa Abseil



Virtual Olympic Challenge



Belfast Half Marathon



Mourne Seven Sevens



Fright Night Firewalk Challenge



Dublin Marathon



Christmas Fundraising



Twilight Hearty Hike



Red Dress Fun Run



Heartfelt Healthy Morning Break



Skydive



Run to Remember



Belfast City Marathon



International Treks, Marathons
and Challenges



**For more information
or to sign up:**

www.nichs.org.uk/events

E: events@nichs.org.uk

T: +44 (0)28 9032 0184

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Research



Each year you help us fund high quality chest, heart, and stroke research. Last year, you made it possible for us to fund four new studies. Thank you.

DOES INCREASING FISH AND OMEGA 3 CONSUMPTION PROTECT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE?

**Professor Emeir McSorley,
Ulster University**



It is recommended that we eat fish twice a week as part of a healthy diet. Fish are rich in omega-3 fats which protect against heart disease and stroke. Despite this, people, especially young adults, don't regularly eat fish. Heart disease starts to develop early in life therefore it is important to make healthy choices to reduce the risk of developing heart disease later in life.

The results of this study will be of benefit to all people, not only in Northern Ireland. If meeting dietary guidelines for fish, or taking supplements, from an early age reduces the risk of developing heart disease, then we can make simple changes to our diets. The results will also be useful to policy makers and health professionals who advise on modifiable factors for the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

WHAT DO STROKE SURVIVORS THINK ABOUT NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR HELPING THEM RECOVER THE USE OF THEIR ARM?

**Dr Emmet McNickle,
Queen's University Belfast**



There are more than 41,000 stroke survivors currently living in Northern Ireland. 77% of all stroke survivors have some degree of arm paralysis, preventing them from returning to many daily living activities.

In 2024, we funded this team to test a new technology, designed as a computer game, that aims to improve arm function. The game provides stroke survivors with feedback from their brains while they imagine moving their arms/hands. The team are comparing stroke survivors using the video game to those imagining arm movements without the game to see which is more effective.

We have funded the team this year to interview stroke patients who have used the new headset for three months. They will ask them their opinions about what works well and what could be improved. Getting the views of those who have, and will, use it will help the team improve the effectiveness of the technology, and create a better experience for people using it.

DOES KALLIKREIN HOLD THE KEY TO TREATING COPD?

**Dr Joe Kidney,
Belfast Health &
Social Care Trust**



A COPD exacerbation, or flare-up, can be triggered by viral infections or other factors. When a person with COPD experiences one of these flare-ups, their symptoms are much worse and can last for days to weeks. Exacerbations can range from mild to severe, with some requiring hospitalisation. Dr Kidney and his team believe that the Kallikrein-Kinin System (KKS) is activated when people have a viral infection. The KKS is a complex sequence of reactions in the body, called a pathway, that regulate blood pressure, clotting, and inflammation.

If the Kallikrein-Kinin pathway plays a role in COPD, this will open the door for new treatment options for people living with COPD. It also potentially provides a new treatment in other areas too. COPD deaths are strongly linked to cardiovascular disease and stroke, and the Kallikrein-Kinin System plays a role in regulating blood pressure and in clotting. It could therefore potentially help us identify treatments that reduce heart attacks and strokes amongst people living with COPD.



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EXPLORING OUT OF HOSPITAL CARDIAC ARREST SURVIVAL RATES

**Professor Adele Marshall,
Queen's University Belfast**



A cardiac arrest is a life-threatening condition where the heart suddenly stops beating or beats irregularly, causing blood flow to stop. This can lead to death if not treated immediately. An Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) happens outside of the hospital setting. It can happen to anyone and can happen suddenly without warning.

NICHS funded the Ambulance Service in 2023 to study the data over the last five years to get a better understanding of OHCA's. This year we funded them and Queen's University Belfast to analyse the Chain of Survival, the crucial steps which need to be taken to increase chances of survival, in more detail.

By analysing this data the Ambulance Service will, for the first time, be able to place public access defibrillators in OHCA hotspots, or in areas where there is inadequate cover. They hope to use their findings to target areas to deliver and improve Community First Responder schemes and CPR training.

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Impact 2024/2025

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.

Throughout 2024/2025, over 36,000 people and organisations across Northern Ireland benefitted from our Care and Health Promotion Services. 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 to read the report in full.

CARE IMPACT

Over the past year, we've helped nearly 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.



2,807
people supported by our
Care Service programmes.

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

515
Respiratory

324
Heart

1,765
Stroke

203
Carers

FAMILY SUPPORT

2,807 people benefitted from our Family Support service. They said...

98%
felt listened to and supported

98%
were confident managing their condition

90%
felt confident accessing support

79%
felt less isolated

STROKE SUPPORT

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.

92% showed an improvement in functional exercises

83% improved in movements needed for everyday tasks

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

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

70% reported an improvement in their mental wellbeing

1/2 The number of people with probable clinical depression dropped by half

RESPIRATORY SUPPORT

515

people were referred to our respiratory services and 139 took part in our Breathing Better Education Programme

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

89%
were more confident managing their condition

90%
reported being more active

93%
felt more confident managing their mental health

RESEARCH IMPACT



22
research studies live at the end of the financial year



4
new projects funded this year



£401,105
awarded to new research projects in 2024/25

POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS IMPACT



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.



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



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 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 rehabilitation, for all conditions, to be made a greater government priority and for recognition that all patients should have a 'right to rehab'.

FUNDRAISING IMPACT

Almost 90% of our income comes from 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.



£3.2 million
raised through public donations and gifts in wills



3,110
regular givers



142
companies fundraised for us



435
community fundraising events organised across NI



Over 1,200
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.

33,464

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

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



Well Talks (Post-Primary)

18,742

students took part

68

schools and organisations

68

Well Talks

88%

of Well Talks covered the topic of vaping

HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE WORKPLACE



A Public Health Agency initiative

1,804

employees benefitted

98

Health Champions trained

1,412

Well Checks delivered

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 over 8,000 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.

8,166

people received checks

22%

signposted for help with high blood pressure

21.3%

signposted for help with high cholesterol

2,787

people (34% of all those checked) were signposted to their GP for additional support



PASS IT ON, DON'T PAY IT OUT - WHY HAVING A WILL MATTERS

As we get older, it is natural to start thinking more about the future and the legacy we will leave behind. One of the most important steps you can take to protect your loved ones is to have a valid, up to date will.

In Northern Ireland we have the dubious honour of being the region with the lowest number of people with a will- only 42% of us have one. Although we might be the worst in the UK for writing wills, those who do write them do so to ensure their families are spared the administrative burden of not having a will.

Making a will gives you control over what happens to your estate after you are gone. Without one, the law decides who inherits your assets. By having a will in place, you can ensure that your savings, property, and personal possessions go to the people and causes that matter most to you. You can also appoint trusted executors, appoint pet guardians, or set out your funeral wishes.

Importantly, a will is a key tool in managing inheritance tax. In the UK, inheritance tax is typically charged at 40% on estates valued over £325,000. That may sound like a high threshold, but with rising property values and personal savings, many estates can be affected.

The good news is there are ways to reduce the amount of tax your estate might pay.

For example, anything left to a spouse or civil partner is usually exempt. You may also qualify for additional allowances if leaving your home to children or grandchildren.

Another powerful option is leaving a gift to charity in your will. Not only is this amount exempt from inheritance tax, but if you leave 10% or more of your taxable estate to charity, the inheritance tax rate on the rest of your estate drops from 40% to 36%. It also means you can help a charity like Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke to continue funding life-saving research, support families through recovery, and improve care for generations to come.

If you would like to know more about inheritance tax and how it could help when making your will, we have a helpful video on our website - nichs.org.uk/iht

If you have not made a will yet, or if it has been years since you reviewed it, now is the time to act. Speak to a solicitor or financial advisor who specialises in estate planning. Taking action today gives peace of mind and ensures your legacy is protected exactly the way you want.

**If you would like a copy of
our Guide to Making Your Will,
please email Alison Vidamour at
avidamour@nichs.org.uk**

Care Services



NEW CAREGIVERS SERVICE

At Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke we understand that caregivers play a vital role in supporting those living with a chest, heart or stroke condition. The role of a caregiver involves a lot of responsibility and can feel overwhelming and isolating at times. We want to support caregivers and have been working on creating a resource to do this.

We are proud to announce we will soon be launching a new online caregivers support offer in the form of videos, which is designed to provide help, guidance, and community to those who need it most. Whether you are new to a caring role or have been supporting a loved one for years, our new platform offers flexible, accessible support from the comfort of your home and at a time that suits you. The videos will form part of our referral pathway for caregivers and will be accessed through a link to our website once a caregiver becomes a NICHHS client.

With support from healthcare professionals, we have been able to develop information and advice videos featuring a Respiratory Specialist Nurse, a Cardiac Specialist Nurse, a Stroke Specialist Nurse, a Physiotherapist, a Speech and Language Therapist and a Pharmacist. Staff from our Care and Public Health teams have also created videos on topics such as chair-based yoga, five steps to wellbeing, and signposting to useful services outside of NICHHS.

We are also very grateful to have had the opportunity to create videos with some caregivers themselves, who share their advice and top tips.

Nikki Horne, a caregiver and NICHHS Family Support Coordinator, has been a caregiver for her husband Michael since 2020 when he had a stroke. On taking part in the development of the new service Nikki says;

“Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke’s new Caregivers Service will offer support for caregivers as and when they need it. All the information to support them will be in one place, at the touch of a button!”

Allen Crooks, an NICHHS volunteer and caregiver for his wife Linda who had a stroke in 2020, also features in the video series and says; “When I look back at where we were as a family when Linda had her stroke to now, it’s such a different story and although we are still faced with different problems, we face them together as a family. I just hope that these videos can help other caregivers who are at the start of their journey - there is light at the end of the tunnel. Please don't be afraid to ask for help, it is there for you!”

We look forward to launching our new Caregivers Service in early autumn and hope it offers the support and advice that caregivers need, in an easily accessible and convenient format.

Here we introduce some of the healthcare professionals who feature in the new Caregivers Service videos.

Diane Crooks

Stroke Nurse Specialist;
Registered General Nurse
BSC; Specialist Practice
in Stroke Nursing.



Experience: I worked as a Stroke Nurse Specialist on the acute site for the Southern Trust at Craigavon Hospital for 17 years until my retirement. My role as a Stroke Nurse Specialist was mainly participating in the development and continuing development of the acute stroke service through my clinical role, stroke audit, facilitating education and training of both nursing staff and the multidisciplinary team.

What you enjoyed most about your role: The area within my role where I gained the most job satisfaction was as an advocate to stroke survivors and their families. Assessing, monitoring, educating and supporting them through their journey in the acute phase after stroke and through lifestyle modification and follow up through my Neurovascular nurse led clinics.

Catherine Lowry, MRCSLT

Speech & Language
Therapy Manager, Stroke
Association in Northern
Ireland; MRCSLT – Member
of the Royal Collage of Speech
& Language Therapists.



Experience: I have 17 years' experience of working as a Speech & Language Therapist (SLT) for the Stroke Association in Northern Ireland. My role includes the delivery of the 8-week SLT Communication Plus group programme, especially designed for stroke survivors living with a communication difficulty to explore and develop new ways to communicate. The group provides the opportunity to develop new friendships and to practice communicating in a friendly and supportive environment. Alongside the group programme I run the online Family & Relatives Aphasia Information course. This is an opportunity for the extended family to better understand the various communication difficulties associated with stroke and learn strategies to better support conversation. Both groups often tell me how much they benefit from sharing experiences and listening to others in a similar situation.

What you enjoy most about your role: Meeting stroke survivors and their families and being able to provide support along their stroke journey.

Siobhán Doyle

Senior Chartered
Physiotherapist; BSc
Honours in Physiotherapy.



Experience: I have worked in the NHS for 37 years, specialising in Respiratory and Cardiology inpatients. I have also led a cardiac exercise class for patients post heart attack and cardiac surgery. More recently I have joined the NICHs PREP physio team.

What you enjoy most about your role: For some people, attending a cardiac or stroke exercise class can be very daunting. It is rewarding for me to see people enjoy the exercise, grow in confidence and continue to exercise as part of their weekly routine.

If you are interested in accessing our Caregivers Service, please make a referral via our website at nichs.org.uk/referral, or if you are already an NICHs client, please talk to your Family Support Coordinator.

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Lobbying & Campaigning

REGISTRATION OF VAPING RETAILERS A WIN FOR NICHS

Over a decade ago in 2014 Stormont passed the Tobacco Retailers Bill requiring anyone who wanted to sell tobacco products to register with their local council. NICHS actively lobbied in support of this Bill, notably successfully arguing for the sanctions for those who broke the law to be made more severe. The measure, which replicated a similar scheme in Scotland, was designed to enhance enforcement efforts against traders who flout the law, especially regarding under 18 sales.

A tobacco registration scheme was subsequently introduced in Wales. Sadly, England did not follow suit therefore when the previous Conservative government, and more recently the new Labour administration, brought forward proposals for a new comprehensive Tobacco and Vaping Bill the Department of Health in London did not include any proposal to register either tobacco or vaping retailers. The Bill includes many welcome measures such as increasing the age of sale for tobacco and restrictions regarding the flavours and advertising colours that can be used by vaping manufacturers, but it was deficient in the eyes of NICHS in not strengthening the hand of councils regarding enforcement.

We took the lead in promoting the idea of extending the tobacco register to include vaping products. Vaping has increased hugely in recent years, most notably amongst young people. The concerns about the health implications of

vaping, for example, on cardiovascular health and respiratory conditions have also increased markedly.

NICHS briefed Health Committee members on tobacco and vaping issues including the idea that the tobacco register in Northern Ireland be extended to include vaping products. NICHS also fed into the consultation on the UK Tobacco and Vaping Bill suggesting the inclusion of a 'vaping register' even though this was not among the proposals included in the consultation.

We are delighted that the UK government subsequently decided to change its Tobacco and Vaping Bill to introduce tobacco and vaping registration for the entire UK. We look forward to the passing of this Bill and the introduction of this measure, at which time we will lobby Stormont and the local councils to ensure that enforcement activity is adequately resourced.

NICHS will be pushing not just for the extension of the register but the introduction of licensing, which the Bill will also facilitate. This will enable government to introduce fees for retailers who wish to sell tobacco or vapes. In the Republic of Ireland similar legislation will see the introduction of fees of €1000 per retail outlet for selling tobacco and a fee of €800 per outlet to sell vapes from February 2026. NICHS believes the introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland would reduce the number of retailers selling tobacco and vapes and assist council's efforts to enforce the relevant regulations.



Supporters

The Red Dress Fun Run 2025 was a heartwarming success, raising an incredible £74,000 to support NICHs's vital work. Despite a last-minute date change due to weather, over 700 participants turned up at Stormont for a joyful 5K run or walk - joined by families, dogs, volunteers, and even superheroes! Now in its eighth year, the event focused on fun, inclusivity, and community, featuring lively entertainment including circus performers, a ukulele band, and a memory wall that touched many hearts.

Support from schools, workplaces, and generous partners like MACE, Musgrave and Linwoods made the event truly shine. From festive costumes to finish-line crêpes, the day was filled with energy, compassion, and a shared commitment to tackling chest, heart and stroke illnesses in Northern Ireland. We are delighted to confirm next year's Red Dress Fun Run will take place on Sunday 22nd March (2026) and we look forward to making the event even bigger and better!



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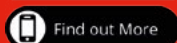
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