

Live Well, Live Longer Strategic Plan

2026 - 2029



Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Introduction

from **the Chief Executive**



Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke (NICHs) was founded on 14th June 1946 with a simple belief that people deserved better health, better care and better chances in life.

Chest, heart and stroke conditions remain the leading causes of death and disability in Northern Ireland. Yet too many of these illnesses are preventable.

This is why our new strategy *Live Well Live Longer* matters.

Our strategy sets out how we will work over the next three years to help people live longer, healthier lives – and to ensure that inequality does not determine life expectancy or quality of life. It is both a statement of intent and a call to action.

Shaped by lived experience

Live Well Live Longer has been shaped by the voices of people with lived experience, carers, volunteers, staff, partners and supporters across Northern Ireland. We listened carefully to what people told us – about what works, where gaps remain and what truly makes a difference when you are living with or at risk of a chest, heart or stroke condition.

People told us that compassionate, human support matters just as much as clinical treatment, that recovery does not end when someone leaves hospital, that carers often feel invisible, and that navigating services can feel overwhelming, particularly for those facing

poverty, isolation or long-term illness.

We also heard challenging questions. Are we reaching everyone who needs us? Are our services accessible to people working full-time, to minority communities, and to those living in rural or highly deprived areas?

This strategy is our response.

The context we are working in

We are delivering this strategy at a time of significant pressure on health and social care services. Waiting lists remain unacceptably long. Workforce shortages persist. Public finances are constrained. At the same time, demand for support continues to rise as our population ages and more people live longer with complex, long-term conditions.

As Northern Ireland's leading health charity we are uniquely placed to bridge the gap between communities and health systems; between prevention and care; between lived experience and policy.

Our purpose and priorities

Our purpose is clear: we stand with people, communities and partners to prevent chest, heart and stroke illnesses, rebuild lives, push for change and challenge health inequalities.

To deliver this purpose, *Live Well Live Longer* focuses on six interconnected priorities, **tackling health inequalities, care and recovery and**

support, prevention and early detection, research and innovation, influencing policy and systems and making a difference and delivering impact.

We are committed to being a values-led organisation that invests in leadership, wellbeing and partnerships, and that uses resources responsibly to deliver the greatest possible impact.

As a charity almost 90% of our income comes from public donations. Every pound raised stays within Northern Ireland. The support we receive 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.

None of this work is possible without our people, volunteers, fundraisers and supporters and we are extremely grateful to each and every one.

Live Well Live Longer sets out how we will play our part over the next three years. It is grounded in evidence, shaped by experience, and driven by a belief that everyone in Northern Ireland deserves the opportunity to live a longer, healthier life.

Declan Cunnane

Chief Executive

Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

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 work is funded thanks to public donations.





Our Mission

We stand with people, communities and partners to prevent chest, heart and stroke illnesses, rebuild lives, push for change and challenge health inequalities.



Our Vision

Everyone in Northern Ireland is living a longer, healthier life free from chest, heart and stroke illnesses.



Our Guiding Principles

Equity - We focus our work where need is greatest to reduce health inequalities.

People centred - We listen to people with lived experience and design services around their needs.

Evidence led - We use research, data and learning to inform decisions and improve impact.

Partnership - We work collaboratively with communities, partners and policy makers.



Our Values



Caring

We put people first - with empathy, compassion and respect for every individual and family we support.



Courageous

We stand up for what matters, speak out on health inequalities and innovate to improve lives.



Connected

We work in partnership with service users, colleagues, volunteers, and communities to achieve more for Northern Ireland's health.



Committed

We are dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of people across Northern Ireland through, prevention, care, research and campaigning.



Considerate

We treat everyone with respect and fairness, valuing different perspectives and acting with integrity in our relationships and decisions.



Our Code of Ethics

All our activities will be undertaken to the highest possible ethical standards. In addition to meeting our legal and regulatory requirements we are committed to acting openly and honestly in all our activities and comply with the standards outlined in the Code of Fundraising Practice and the Charity Governance Code.

- ✓ We will act honestly, truthfully and with integrity in all our actions.
- ✓ We will report our activities in a transparent and open way.
- ✓ We will treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- ✓ We will always act impartially and objectively and avoid conflicts of interest.

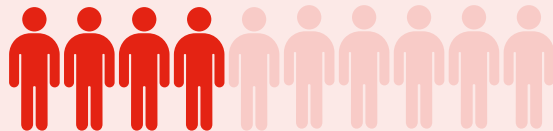
Why Our Work Matters

Northern Ireland in Numbers

This breakdown of the most up-to-date available statistics on chest, heart and stroke conditions in Northern Ireland demonstrates just why our care, prevention, research and campaigning work is so vital.

In the adult population

**Approximately 600,000 people
are living with a chest, heart or stroke condition**



**This means around 4 in 10 of adults live
with CHS conditions (40%)**

This is made up of around 400,000 people who have a chest, heart or stroke diagnosis (about 1 in 3) and approximately 200,000 living with undiagnosed conditions



#1 cause of death

Deaths due to chest, heart and stroke conditions were the #1 cause of death in 2024



19 deaths per day

(6,816 each year) are caused by chest, heart and stroke conditions combined



38% of all deaths

About 4 in 10 deaths were due to CHS conditions

Data correct at time of publishing.

Circulatory Conditions

Any conditions that affect your heart or blood vessels



Approximately 500,000 adults are living with circulatory conditions



12 deaths every day (4,416 in 2024)



112 hospital admissions every day (40,864 in 2025)

10 people have a heart attack every day in NI (3721)



Coronary Heart Disease is the **biggest single cause of premature deaths** (in people younger than 75) across NI

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)



299,896 people or **20% of the adult population** have a diagnosis of high blood pressure



Around 120,000 have undiagnosed high blood pressure... maybe more



When those diagnosed and undiagnosed are combined, **around 1 in 3 of the adult population** have high blood pressure



Hypertension is the #1 cause of stroke

Stroke & TIA

When the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off.

A transient ischaemic attack (TIA) or “mini stroke” is caused by a temporary disruption in the blood supply to part of the brain.



42,531 people have a stroke or TIA diagnosis



About 2 deaths every day (883 in 2024)



9 people had a stroke every day (3,170 people in 2024)

Women and Heart Disease

2x

Heart disease killed **more than twice as many** women in NI as cervix, uterus, ovary and breast cancer combined in 2024 (1,175 vs 524)



Nearly twice as many women **died from Coronary Heart Disease than breast cancer** in 2024 (592 vs 286)

Respiratory Conditions

Any disease that affects the lungs and airways.



Approximately 220,000 people are living with respiratory conditions



6 deaths every day (2,316 in 2024)



83 hospital admissions every day (30,285 in 2025)

Atrial Fibrillation



48,799 people have a diagnosis of Atrial Fibrillation (AF)



Around 12,000 people may have undetected AF



People with AF are at **greater risk of stroke** and their stroke is **more likely to be severe**

Deprivation and Inequality

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is one of the conditions most strongly associated with health inequalities. **In NI, people living in the most deprived areas (compared to the least deprived) are...**



You're up to 30% more likely to die early from CVD depending on **where you live**



Preventable deaths in the most deprived areas were **three times higher** than the least deprived areas

Health and Lifestyle



SMOKING

Smoking is the single greatest cause of preventable illness and premature death in Northern Ireland, killing around **2,200 people in 2023/24.**

12% of people currently smoke
1 in 10 women smoke during pregnancy
5% of Year 8-14 pupils currently smoke
17% of 16-34 year olds currently smoke

Smoking robs 10 – 15 years of healthy life.



E-CIGS

9% of people currently use e-cigs (2025)
20% of 11–18 year olds have tried an e-cigarette
15% of 11-18 year olds currently vape



ALCOHOL

397 deaths in 2024 due to alcohol consumption



DIET

56% of adults didn't get 5+ portions of fruit & veg a day in 2025



OBESITY

67% of adults
27% of Year 8 pupils and **1 in 3** 2-10 year olds are overweight or obese

1 in 4 P1 children are overweight or obese



ACTIVITY

45% of adults are not getting the recommended amount of physical activity

Children in NI have the lowest physical activity levels in the UK

Primary school children are **sedentary 5 hrs a day** and post-primary students **7 hrs a day**

Purpose

This strategy sets out how we will deliver our mission between 2026 and 2029. It includes all strategic priorities, supporting pillars, priority actions and success measures, and is intended to guide planning, delivery, performance management and accountability across the organisation.

The following six strategic priorities define what we will deliver between 2026 and 2029. They are supported by organisational enablers set out later in this document.

Strategic Priorities



**Tackling
Health Inequalities**



**Care,
Recovery and Support**



**Health Promotion
and Prevention**



**Influencing Policy
and Government**



**Research
and Innovation**



**Making a
Real Difference**

Strategic Priority 1:

Tackling Health Inequalities



Aim

To reduce health inequalities across Northern Ireland by empowering and partnering with communities to prevent chest, heart and stroke conditions, promote healthy lifestyles, and ensure equitable access to prevention and support services.



Priority actions

- Target services and resources at areas of highest need and high-risk population groups.
- Improve access to services for people who need us most.
- Promote inclusive research to address inequity and unmet needs within our population.
- Campaign for improvements in population health and action on tackling health inequalities.



Strategic Priority 2:

Care, Recovery and Support



Aim

To ensure that everyone affected by chest, heart or stroke conditions receives compassionate, high-quality and continuous support to rebuild their lives.



Priority actions

- Deliver high-quality, person-centred support services.
- Involve service users and carers in planning and shaping services.
- Strengthen quality, safety and good practice.
- Embed ACTivate as NICHHS's psychological support offer.
- Improve consistency across all five local areas.
- Demonstrate impact through clear reporting.



Strategic Priority 3:

Health Promotion and Prevention



Aim

To empower people to make informed healthy lifestyle choices and prevent avoidable chest, heart and stroke outcomes.



Priority actions

- Increase awareness and detection of risk factors.
- Empower people to take control of their health.
- Promote healthy schools and young people.
- Champion healthy workplaces that support employee wellbeing.
- Ensure services are evidence based, high quality and safe.



Strategic Priority 4:

Influencing Policy and Government



Aim

To be the leading local advocate for cardiovascular and respiratory health and influence policy and practice.



Priority actions

- Push for stronger prevention policies.
- Influence better survivor care and support.
- Campaign for NI-wide chest, heart and stroke strategies.
- Empower service users and communities.
- Strengthen policy positions through evidence.
- Monitor political and system opportunities.



Strategic Priority 5:

Research and Innovation



Aim

To fund and support high-quality local research that improves prevention, services and outcomes.



Priority actions

- Attract high-quality research applications.
- Fund research delivering tangible benefits.
- Support collaborative research.
- Use digital tools for research management.
- Maintain a skilled and diverse Scientific Research Committee.
- Ensure ethical and quality compliance.



Strategic Priority 6:

Making a Real Difference



Aim

To deliver impact that matters and clearly demonstrate how NICHS improves lives.



Priority actions

- Build a strong evidence base.
- Use feedback and data to improve services.
- Measure and communicate impact clearly.



Strategic Support

To ensure that our charitable activities can be delivered we rely on the support of a number of vital supporting teams.

Income Generation

Almost 90% of our care and prevention services and research are funded exclusively by public donations. So it is crucial that we raise sufficient income to fund our work. Most of our work is only made possible by the incredible commitment and support of individuals, families, friends and companies who are passionate about helping us.

We are going to need the public's support more than ever to enable us to deliver our ambitious new strategy to expand our services, so that we can help even more people.

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



Communications

In order for people to avail of our services and to support our charity it is vital that people are aware of NICHHS, what we do and difference we make. We will continue to make people aware of the symptoms and causes of chest, heart and stroke illnesses and increase public awareness of how to reduce risks of developing these conditions.

People

Our staff and volunteers are at the heart of NICHHS. With our Gold Investors in People accreditation we will continue to develop our culture where our people are inspired, developed, supported and proud to work for us.

Finance

Our finance is and always will be effectively managed and controlled. At all times we will continue to ensure compliance with appropriate financial procedures and controls.

Governance

We are led by our Board of Governors who ensure trust and confidence in our charity. With a mix of skills and experience the board will ensure we have appropriate strategic, operational plans and budgets in place and that progress is regularly monitored.

Physical & Digital Resources

We need to make sure our staff have the appropriate ICT in order to help them to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. It is also crucial that our staff and our premises are safe. We will ensure that our ICT strategies and health and safety strategies are implemented and reviewed.



Health Advice



PROTECT YOUR HEART: WHY BLOOD PRESSURE AND CHOLESTEROL MATTER

Your heart is one of the hardest working muscles in your body. Day and night it pumps blood to every organ, fuelling your body and keeping your mind sharp. Your heart is your body's engine, yet heart disease remains the leading cause of death worldwide. The good news? Most heart problems are preventable. Taking care of your heart now can help you feel better and live longer.

Know Your Numbers

Two of the most important clues to heart health are blood pressure and cholesterol levels. High blood pressure, which is often called the 'silent killer', can damage and weaken your arteries long before you notice symptoms. Similarly, high cholesterol can lead to fatty buildup, narrowing arteries, making it harder for blood to flow and increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. That is why health experts and we at NICHHS, stress the importance of regular blood pressure and cholesterol checks, even if you feel fine.

New Blood Pressure Guidelines

Blood pressure guidelines have recently been updated by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and are:

**Non-elevated –
less than 120/70 mmHg**

**Elevated – between 120/70
mmHg and 139/89 mmHg**

**Hypertension –
over 140/90 mmHg**



These new guidelines will help people identify problems early before too much damage is caused. If you have non-elevated blood pressure, continue to lead a healthy lifestyle to prevent it elevating or getting high. Remember, small changes like eating more healthily and being more active can bring blood pressure down without medication. If you have high blood pressure and your doctor has prescribed medication however it is important to take it as prescribed, alongside adopting a healthier lifestyle.

Easy Ways To Protect Your Heart

Protecting your heart does not always mean making big changes! Below are some small steps you can take towards a healthier lifestyle:

- ✓ **Don't smoke or get support to stop smoking.** Smoking harms your heart and blood vessels. If you don't smoke, don't vape.
- ✓ **Move your body.** Aim for at least 20-30 minutes each day of moderate intensity exercise like walking, dancing, or playing a sport that you enjoy.
- ✓ **Reduce salt intake.** Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt a day (about a teaspoonful) and children should have even less. This includes the salt already in our food plus what we add at the table.
- ✓ **Reduce alcohol consumption, or don't drink.** To keep the health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week and to spread these units out over the week. Also allow 2-3 alcohol free days a week.

- ✓ **Eat colourful foods.** Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. Frozen or canned foods count too.

- ✓ **Choose wholegrains and lean meats** or cheaper options such as **beans or pulses.**

- ✓ **Drink more water.** Cut down on soda and sugary drinks.

- ✓ **Relax.** Take time to rest, laugh, enjoy hobbies you love or have a cuppa with a friend.

Take Charge Of Your Health

Prevention and early detection of risk factors is key. Plan regular checkups, ideally once a year, to measure your blood pressure and cholesterol with your GP, local pharmacist or book a health check at NICHs. Buying a blood pressure machine is a sound investment so you can check your blood pressure at home, and your loved one's too.

Your heart works tirelessly for you. Taking a few moments to check your numbers and making heart-healthy choices is one of the best ways to return the favour.










Thank you

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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