

# Disability Action Plan 2024-2029



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## Alternative Formats

This document is available in alternative formats including:

- Large font
- Braille
- Main minority ethnic languages
- DAISY
- Easy-read
- Electronic version.

Please see contact details of the relevant Equality Team in each Trust on Page 19.

## Introduction

Welcome to our new Disability Action Plan. This Plan sets out the actions the Health and Social Care Trusts will take forward collaboratively over the next five years.

There are six Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland. Five of which provide integrated health and social care services. These are as follows:

- **Belfast HSC Trust,**
- **Northern HSC Trust**
- **South Eastern HSC Trust**
- **Southern HSC Trust**
- **Western HSC Trust**



The sixth Trust, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, is responsible for providing emergency, urgent and primary care services across all of Northern Ireland and safely transporting patients.

The six Trusts would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your contributions to our Disability Action Plan.

Our Plan lays out the actions that we are proposing in response to our dual disability duties under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended). We have developed this Plan to progress our two disability duties to promote positive attitudes and encourage full participation of disabled people in public life. Actions to

address inequalities experienced by disabled people are included in our regional five year Equality Action Plan, informed by our engagement with disabled people and representative organisations.

The actions in this Plan are based on feedback from disabled people and through our ongoing collective and local engagement. We remain committed to working in partnership with disabled people, their representative organisations and the community and voluntary sector and look forward to working collaboratively on our actions during the lifetime of this five-year Plan.

We will value and prioritise disabled people's voices and expertise to ensure the actions in this plan make a real and meaningful difference.

It is important to note that the Trusts are using the term 'disabled people' which recognises people as being disabled by barriers in society and not by any impairment or difference. We acknowledge that language can be a personal choice but hope that this clarification illustrates why we refer consistently to disabled people. We will review it on an ongoing basis and provide annual reports against progress.

## Our achievements so far

The Trusts have worked collaboratively to achieve regional best practice and consistency and allowed us to combine our resources to maximise our efforts.

We provide updates in our annual progress reports to the Equality Commission and to our Executive Teams and Trust Boards to demonstrate the progress we have made (all of which are available on our respective websites).

For illustrative purposes, below are a few of the successful actions in our last Disability Action Plan.



## Making Communication Accessible

The issue of communication has and continues to feature as a barrier – with a clear need for health and social care organisations to make improvements. The Trusts worked with disabled people and representative organisations to co-develop a [guide](#) for HSC staff on how to provide accessible communication for people with a disability. It has been recognised as a useful and valuable resource in improving communication for people with a disability and their experience in health and social care.

## Disability Equality Training Resource

Working in partnership with disabled people, we have co-produced a [Disability Equality Training video](#). This video is delivered by people with a disability and is available for health and social care organisations and their partners to make sure disability people are treated with respect and dignity.

## Disability Toolkit



The Disability Policy and Toolkit was co-developed by health and social care organisations and their respective trade union representatives and disability organisations. The one-stop Toolkit is available in easy-read format and a virtual, Page Tiger resource and provides a comprehensive overview of all issues related to disability for managers and staff.

## Regional Communication Support Service

In January 2023, a regional procurement process was finalised for the provision a HSC Communication Support Service for People who are d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and Hard of Hearing, contracted directly by the Strategic Planning and Performance Group. By April 2023, a specialist Provider was secured to deliver a range of high quality, accessible, regionally consistent and sustainable communication supports for people who are d/Deaf, d/Deafblind, or Hard of Hearing across all HSC services. The design and development of the service reflects the RQIA Review of Sensory Support Services in 2011 and subsequent extensive research, public consultation and engagement with sign language users and interpreters. The establishment of a remote sign language interpreting service continues to ensure that our Deaf service users have access to a free online remote sign language interpreter 24/7 for health and social care appointments.

### What is in our Disability Action Plan

The following tables outline what you have told us and the actions we will take over the next five years. This Plan is a live document. It is designed to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances over the five-year period.

Our Plan will be reviewed on an on-going basis and we will report annually via our S75 Annual Progress Report to the ECNI, which is submitted at the end of August each year and available on all of our websites or by contacting the Equality Units.

## Section 1 – Actions to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

Disabled people have told us that negative attitudes are often the biggest and most common barrier they face and we believe as a large service provider and employer we have a vital role to play in shaping and modelling positive attitudes towards disabled people. Section 1 of this Plan focuses on promoting positive attitudes through an inclusive approach to the use of images and language, providing better training, guidance and support for our staff and ensuring our Disability Action Plan is easy to access.

What you told us	What we will do ( <i>Actions</i> )	By when	How will we measure success
There is a need for greater visibility of disabled people.	1. We will continue to promote disability equality and the social model of disability through an inclusive approach to the use of images, which reinforce a positive attitude towards disabled people and disabled staff members.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased visibility of disabled people and disabled staff, including those with hidden disability in Trust publications, use of social media and online presence.</li> <li>Proactive promotion and communication of our co-production with disabled people and disability-related events.</li> </ul>
	2. We will mark and celebrate allocated disability – related days to raise awareness at a local and regional level.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-produced calendar of events organised and publicised annually.</li> <li>Increased staff awareness of disability equality.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
<p>That the disability legislation in Northern Ireland is very complex and there is a need to ensure our Disability Action Plan is accessible and easy to understand.</p>	<p>3. We will work with disabled people and representative groups to enhance the profile and accessibility of the regional Disability Action Plan to ensure that the legislation and disabled people's rights are easier to understand.</p>	<p>March 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of the accessible Disability Action Plan internally and externally.</li> <li>• Disability Action Plan available on Trust websites and internal intranets, including Easy Read and Signed versions</li> <li>• Proactively disseminate the Disability Action Plan to key stakeholders.</li> <li>• Co-produced resource explaining the disability duties and legislative requirements.</li> </ul>
<p>All health and social care staff should be trained on disability equality and disability duties.</p>	<p>4. We will review our staff training programmes and ensure that training is co-produced, reflects lived experience and includes information on disability equality and the disability duties and promotes the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training.</p>	<p>March 2025 and review Annually</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of training completed.</li> <li>• Feedback on training gathered from staff to inform the evaluation.</li> <li>• Increased awareness of disability duties.</li> <li>• Co-production of training resources on disability equality and disability duties.</li> <li>• United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) guide for HSC staff updated.</li> </ul>





## Section 2 – Actions to encourage participation by disabled people in public life

Disabled people have told us that too often, they and their representative organisations face barriers to full and effective participation. These include inaccessible physical and online environments and inaccessible information and communication. Actions in this section focus on increasing disabled people’s participation in decisions about policies and service development.

It is important to note that the Trusts do not have direct control over public life positions within health and social care, however we do have disabled people sitting on many of our user groups and forums so we have also included actions to ensure these opportunities are accessible and promoted.

As one of the largest employers in Northern Ireland, disabled people have told us that this section of the Plan must include how disabled people have the opportunity to find out about the range of jobs available in health and social care and ensure people are provided with appropriate support to enhance employability and obtain employment.

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
<p>Disabled people want to be clear on how they can get involved, be heard and inform decisions.</p>	<p>5. We will share opportunities for involvement to ensure the voice of disabled people is heard in developments and changes to services at an early stage.</p>	<p>March 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a specific database of disabled people and organisations and determine the best way for them to be involved.</li> <li>• Consultee database reviewed and updated annually.</li> <li>• Increased usage of involvement section on each Trust website and the Public Health Agency (PHA) “Engage” website and sharing of links with disabled people and representative organisations.</li> <li>• Promotion of Trust Involvement Teams and involvement opportunities with disabled people and representative groups.</li> <li>• Use of alt text in our social media.</li> </ul>
	<p>6. We will work in partnership with relevant key organisations and individuals to identify advocacy services.</p>	<p>March 2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a Directory of Advocacy and Support Services co-produced with representative organisations, published on each Trust’s website (and in alternative formats) and disseminated widely - reviewed on annual basis.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
	7. We will work with representatives from the Regional Disabled People's Forum on disability equality issues.	April 2025 and annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual meeting with members of Regional Disabled People's Forum.</li> </ul>
	8. We will review the membership of our user forums and where necessary work to increase representation of disabled people and representing organisations.	April 2025 and annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of membership of forums and user groups completed.</li> <li>• Gaps identified where increased representation of disabled people on user groups and forums is required.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
<p>Consultation methods must be accessible to disabled people.</p>	<p>9. We will ensure that all consultations are inclusive, targeted and use appropriate methods to ensure participation of a wide range of disabled people.</p>	<p>April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checklist developed that includes standards for the accessibility of public meeting areas, the provision of information in accessible formats, and the use of new technologies suitable for disabled people.</li> <li>• Consultation processes designed to be as inclusive as possible from the outset.</li> <li>• Focused consultation with disabled participants as required.</li> <li>• Improved opportunities for disabled people to engage with and influence policy-makers.</li> <li>• Methods and tools used for online involvement will allow disabled people to participate on a fair and equal basis.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
It is the responsibility of HSC staff to book communication support for people who are D/deaf and Hard of Hearing	10. We will continue the roll out of the Health and Social Care Communication Support Service for People who are d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and Hard of Hearing and improve access to Sign Video within hospitals using computers and phones accessing the Trust Wi-Fi.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional consistency and equity of access to communication support for people who are Deaf/deaf or have hearing loss.</li> <li>• Improved access to communication support for people who are Deaf/deaf or Hard of Hearing.</li> <li>• Increased awareness of HSC staff of need to provide communication support.</li> <li>• Reduction in complaints about lack of communication support available/provided.</li> </ul>
Consideration should be given to the installation of Changing Places toilets in all hospitals in Northern Ireland	11. We will scope the availability of Changing Places and new facilities will be added in accordance with legislation.	April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping of all facilities completed.</li> <li>• Gaps identified in relation to relevant legislation.</li> <li>• Improved access to HSC services for disabled people.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
Staff need to understand how to involve disabled people in decisions they make about services.	12. We will co-produce guidance for staff on how to effectively engage with disabled people in decision making processes. These guidelines will provide practical information to support staff to address the barriers to meaningfully involvement.	April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and social care decision makers have access to good quality co-produced information and resources to improve participation of disabled people in decision making.</li> <li>• Improved participation of disabled people in health and social care decisions.</li> </ul>
	13. We will co-produce and hold a masterclass in each Trust area for health and social care decision makers to develop a deeper understanding of how better participation with disabled people is central to the implementation of our Disability Action Plan.	April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective participation masterclass developed in partnership with disabled people and representative organisations.</li> <li>• Masterclass held – one in each Trust area.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
Policies need to be kept up to date and relevant, to support disabled staff to remain in the workplace.	14. We will review our Staff Disability Equality Policy in line with best practice to ensure it remains fit for purpose and relevant.	March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of Disability Equality Policy completed in partnership with disabled staff.</li> <li>Revised regional policy in place.</li> </ul>
	15. We will review and update our Disability Toolkit.	March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated Disability Toolkit in place.</li> <li>Policy and Toolkit reviewed and amended in partnership with disabled staff.</li> </ul>
	16. We will engage with disabled staff to ensure they have a voice and influence the support we provide.	March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Method of ongoing engagement established in each Trust area.</li> </ul>

What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
<p>There is a need for more opportunities for disabled people to gain employment within health and social care.</p>	<p>17. We will work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to review our employability schemes and placement schemes to enhance employment opportunities.</p>	<p>March 2026</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities and availability of our employability schemes and placement schemes scoped.</li> <li>• Plans developed to enable and support employment placements and work experience for disabled people across each Trust.</li> </ul>
	<p>18. We will work to reduce barriers to recruitment in health and social care for disabled people.</p>	<p>Throughout the lifetime of the plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to recruitment in health and social care identified in partnership with disabled people and representative organisations.</li> <li>• Development of actions, in line with the legislative provisions and supported by equality data, to improve access to employment for disabled people.</li> </ul>
	<p>19. We will provide an alternative way for disabled applicants to apply for HSC jobs until the current HSC jobs website is replaced by the new system.</p>	<p>Throughout the lifetime of the plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method for disabled applicants to apply for HSC jobs available.</li> <li>• Better communication with disabled applicants who require adjustments or support with their application.</li> </ul>



What you told us	What we will do (Actions)	By when	How will we measure success
There is a need to improve visibility and awareness of jobs for anyone who is disabled.	20. We will work towards Disability Positive Accreditation for all Trusts.	March 2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability Positive Accreditation achieved.</li> <li>• Increased awareness among disabled people of HSC jobs available.</li> </ul>
Better data on service users communication support needs is required.	21. We will continue to work with ENCOMPASS to ensure that the communication support needs of service users are captured.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication support needs are recorded on the ENCOMPASS system.</li> <li>• Improved communication and access to services.</li> </ul>
	22. We will support the involvement of disabled people and representative organisations in the roll out of ENCOMPASS. <i>(Encompass is a new Health and Social Care Northern Ireland (HSCNI) wide initiative that will introduce a digital integrated care record to Northern Ireland.)</i>	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved engagement with disabled people in the roll out of Encompass.</li> </ul>

## Contact Details

For more details of our achievements in meeting our dual disability duties, please refer to our respective Annual Progress Reports which are available online or by contacting the relevant Equality Team.

[www.belfasttrust.hscni.net](http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net)

[www.northerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net)

[www.setrust.hscni.net](http://www.setrust.hscni.net)

[www.southerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net)

[www.westerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net)

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