

30 October 2025

Protracted Waits and Service Improvement Initiatives

For each of the financial years listed below, please provide:

Any targets set by your Trust to reduce the number of protracted waits (6 hours or more) experienced by patients who met the criteria for detention for assessment under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and required admission to inpatient mental health beds.

Details of any relevant service improvement initiatives, service reconfigurations, or investments made by your Trust under the Mental Health Action Plan which were specifically aligned to reducing the number of such protracted waits.

- 2019/20
- 2020/21
- 2021/22
- 2022/23
- 2023/24
- 2024/25

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is committed to ensuring timely, safe, and compassionate care for individuals requiring psychiatric inpatient admission. The Trust recognises that protracted waits can be distressing for both patients and staff, and has undertaken a series of targeted initiatives to improve access, experience, and outcomes.

Service Improvement and Investment

- Psychiatric Assessment and Treatment Hub (PATH), Mater Hospital (2024–2025):
A major service development providing a therapeutic and purpose-designed environment for individuals awaiting admission to psychiatric inpatient units. PATH has significantly reduced time spent in Emergency Departments and enhanced the patient experience. Investment includes dedicated psychiatric nursing, consultant cover, and multidisciplinary input.
- Regional Bed Coordinator (2022):
A Band 8a post established to strengthen regional collaboration, optimise bed flow across Northern Ireland, and support equitable and timely access to inpatient beds.
- Home Treatment Team (HTT) In-Reach Role (2024–2025):
A Band 7 position embedded within AMHIC to identify safe and early discharges, facilitate smooth transitions, and improve overall patient flow.

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- This approach promotes continuity of care, patient independence, and reintegration into the community.
- Special Observations Support:
Dedicated staff provide therapeutic engagement for individuals awaiting admission in Emergency Departments or community settings, supporting safety, dignity, and relieving pressure on key clinical staff.
- Approved Social Worker (ASW) Workforce Investment (from 2023):
Expansion of full-time ASW posts, introduction of flexible working arrangements, and enhanced resource allocation to safeguard wellbeing, compliance, and timely statutory intervention.
- Mental Health Order Protracted Waits Standard Operating Procedure (2025):
A governance framework designed to ensure patients assessed as requiring inpatient admission are safely managed, including a clear delegation pathway and accountability structure.

Continuous Improvement and Oversight

- Daily Bed Flow Meetings (from 2023):
Multidisciplinary collaboration to monitor capacity, prioritise admissions, and ensure patient safety. In 2025, this was enhanced to include tri-daily meetings, one chaired by the Mental Health Collective Leadership Team, reinforcing accountability and shared decision-making

The Trust remains committed to continuously improving both patient experience and staff working conditions, recognising that timely, coordinated, and compassionate mental health care depends on a well-supported and empowered workforce.