

Appendix 1

**Regional Equality Action Plan
2024-2029 Update Year 2 March 2026**

**Regional Disability Action Plan
2024-2029 Update Year 2 March 2026**

HSCNI EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2024 – 2029
Southern Health & Social Care Trust Update March 2026



This Plan sets out the actions the Health and Social Care Trusts will take forward collaboratively over the next five years.

This Equality Action Plan has been developed to tackle ongoing and emergent inequalities experienced by people protected by the nine Section 75 groups - that is people of different ages, religious beliefs, racial groups, political opinions, marital status, sexual orientations, men and women generally, people with and without disabilities, people with and without caring responsibilities.

How we developed this Plan

Actions and priorities in this Plan have been informed by an audit of inequalities. The purpose of the audit was to identify key areas of potential inequality. To ensure consistency of approach and equity across the region, the six Trusts have worked collaboratively to gather emerging themes in relation to key inequalities experienced by the nine equality categories. We have collated available research and data to identify emerging themes, which we shared at regional listening events in June and July 2022 with a range of stakeholders including service users, carers, staff and trade unions representatives. We have developed our Equality Action Plan based on our consideration of the research and the feedback from the listening events. We also issued our draft Equality Action Plan for formal consultation for sixteen weeks between June and September 2023. Our intention is to have actions that will make a real and meaningful difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland by addressing the inequalities they experience or to better promote equality of opportunity. The audit of inequalities will also be a valuable resource for future equality screening and equality impact assessments.

Purpose of the Plan

We recognise that inequalities have regrettably worsened during the unprecedented global Covid-19 pandemic, the health and social care system, as a whole, is working continuously, and collectively to try to address the long waiting lists, waiting times and workforce challenges. Many health inequalities will be addressed through the day-to-day provision of health and social care services – for example, higher prevalence of mental ill health will be directly addressed regionally through the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy and delivery of mental health services across the Trusts.

From the outset, it is important to acknowledge this Plan will not be able to tackle all of these systemic inequalities but will focus on those inequalities in health and social care experienced by those protected in law by the equality and good relations duties of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We also know that some of the inequalities identified in our previous audit of inequalities are persistent, having not yet been fully addressed and will remain as ongoing themes, on which we will continue to focus. This Action Plan goes beyond our compliance with our respective Equality Schemes but is complementary to the Schemes and seeks to address inequalities relative to our functions. We have deliberately focussed our actions to achieve better accessibility in service provision and to promote inclusion and diversity for those who work in health and social care.

This five-year Plan is designed to be flexible, adaptable and responsive to changing needs, emerging inequalities and circumstances. We will also review the Plan alongside our corporate plans and any legislative changes.

Section 1 – Improving the data we use to support decision-making

The Trusts monitor staff across the 9 equality categories to ensure equality of opportunity. Staff input their own equality information on an online system but there are currently gaps in the data available.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
1. We will take active measures to encourage staff to update their equality monitoring information as part of corporate welcome/staff induction and by developing a regional and local campaign to encourage staff to update their equality profile information.	April 2024 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Regular awareness raising campaigns to encourage staff to update their equality data. - Development of regional and local campaigns with timescales for staff to update their equality profile. - Increase in percentage of staff completing their equality monitoring data.¹ - Promotional resources/Toolkits produced and disseminated to promote inclusion of all staff. - Input into the EQUIP project to ensure the next HR IT system is fully appropriate and fit for operational purpose. Regional subgroups to support its development and implementation. - Benchmark where appropriate with examples of good practice.	
Responsible: Regional Employment Group Update: Progressing within Regional Employment Equality Group. Representatives from Regional Employment Equality Group also involved in regional sub groups of EQUIP and regularly reports updates as required. Trust EDI pages on sharepoint includes a page tiger information and a link for staff to update their Equality Data. Reminder regularly includes in EDI communications.			

¹ n.b. Provision of equality monitoring data on our Information System is voluntary for HSC staff but staff are encouraged to complete and update.

ENCOMPASS is a new health and social care wide programme that will introduce a digital integrated care record to Northern Ireland.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
2. We will work collaboratively to influence the ENCOMPASS programme to ensure that it monitors ethnicity, first language and communication support needs of patients and service users.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	• Ethnicity and communication support needs recorded on ENCOMPASS system. • Increased access to communication support in timely fashion. • Improved policy formulation, service delivery and population health data.	
Responsible: Encompass Leads Only available in English, function for Arabic but not switched on. Service users can record own ethnicity and language needs in my Care app. Remains a work in progress for the Encompass regional team. Accessibility issues for staff raised by RNIB, solution being implemented to attach software such as Fusion and Dragon for those with sight loss – remains a work in progress with the Encompass regional team.			
Under a new way of planning and commissioning services, the Integrated Care System (ICS) will bring together health and social care organisations, partners in voluntary and community sectors and local government, to develop population health plans to improve outcomes and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
3. We will work with partners to ensure the inclusion and analysis of Section 75 data in the development of population health plans.	April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	• Robust population health plans including Section 75 data. • Identification of health inequalities. • Targeted services that address identified health inequalities and improve health outcomes.	
Responsible: AD Update: Southern area will move from test to shadow Nov 2025. Western area and South Eastern area are stood up in shadow in November 2024. Belfast and Northern area to be stood up in early 2025. PHA will have to publish population health plans for each AIPB.			

Section 2 – Addressing barriers to accessing health and social care

While much work has been done to date to promote equality of opportunity, it remains the case that there are a number of equality groups, who continue to face particular and unique barriers. During the listening events and consultation period, we heard many suggestions on how to improve equality of access to health and social care services. The following actions have been developed in response to what we have heard, and are aimed at providing welcoming, person-centred and accessible services for everyone.

Trusts have a duty to promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The regional Health and Social Care Good Relations Statement provides a consistent message in terms of our commitment to good relations. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) has consulted on a co-produced Good Relations Strategy, which includes actions that will promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
4. All Trusts will adopt the Good Relations Strategy and work collaboratively, with our partners, to take forward the actions and ensure consistency across Northern Ireland.	September 2026	- Co-produced Good Relations Strategy. - Strategy adopted by all Trusts. - Regional approach to promotion of good relations in HSC Trusts where relevant.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion / Promoting Well Being team / User involvement team Update: BHSCT have issued their version - 3rd Good Relations Strategy - 1 .			

We know that there is a lot of information available on improving health and wellbeing but we need to make sure that the content is understood and accessible.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
5. We will co-develop a series of health and social care seminars with representative organisations, communities and individuals to support health and wellbeing and address inequalities	April 2025 and annually thereafter	- Improved inclusive health and well-being information, targeted at the effected communities. - One regional seminar held each year. - Feedback and evaluation of seminars.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Regional Cultural Competency framework launch event 5 February 2025. Online training and booklet developed to run alongside f2f training for staff.			
During Covid-19, the increased use of facemasks caused communication difficulties for Deaf and hard of hearing people and people who lip-read. The regional Health and Social Care Communication Support Service for People who are d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and Hard of Hearing was established in 2023 to provide consistent and improved access to communication support when accessing health and social care services.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
6. We will ensure staff are aware of the Health and Social Care Communication Support Service for People who are d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and Hard of Hearing and the facemasks approved by Infection Prevention Control, that are more accessible for people who have hearing loss, are Deaf/deaf and lip-read.	April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Greater awareness of the regional HSC Communication Support Service for People who are d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and Hard of Hearing. - Greater awareness of the importance and availability of accessible facemasks. - Improved communication and patient experience. - Reduction in complaints. - Increase in compliments/positive feedback. - Proactive and targeted use of Care Opinion to promote better communication.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion			

Update:

Regular communications issued regrading sign language interpreting options and booking arrangements.

The contract for Sign Language Provision is with SPPG. Linked in with Trust Sensory support team.

SL Interpreter Training organised for ED staff in CAH and DHH

Trust Communication Support Guidelines to be updated and reissued during Sign Language Awareness week – communication plan in place. (Similarities with DAP Action 10)

The Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS) provides professionally trained interpreters on a face-to-face basis. Trusts also have a regional contract for telephone interpreting for people, whose first language is not English, when accessing Health and Social Care services across Northern Ireland. Feedback indicated that access to interpreting support remains a barrier for some when accessing services.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
7. We will develop an interpreting card for patients and service users to present when they are in health and social care facilities. The card will indicate that the service user needs an interpreter and include contact details.	April 2025	• Interpreting card for service users and patients to bring to their appointments to help support their communication needs. • Promotion of card in training sessions. • Increased staff awareness. • Reduction in complaints about lack of interpreting support.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion

Update:

example of card from SHSCT



Interpreter Card
Southern Trust Bulg

Neurodiversity is a broad term, used to describe the many and varying ways in which human brains are wired. It encompasses the wide variety of ways humans think, learn, feel and process information. Neurodiversity can include Autism, ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia and Acquired Brain Injury. We acknowledge that staff, as well as patients and service users live with neurodiversity and there is a need to raise neurodiversity awareness in the workplace and in the provision of our services.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
8. We will draft and co-produce neurodiversity guidance and a podcast for our staff along with key stakeholders including experts by experience.	April 2026	• Production of an online signposting resource/service directory on neurodiversity services. • Increased awareness and information provision for staff in terms of people who are neurodiverse. • Improved user experience. • Improved awareness of information and services for people who are neurodiverse. • Dissemination and launch of guidance.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion /ASD Services MHD

Update:

Trust has regional Neurodiversity Awareness Training for staff on LearnHSC



[LearnHSCNI | Neurodiversity Awareness Training](#)

We know that rurality has an impact on equality of access to services, especially for older people, due to lack of accessible transport, times of appointments and the availability of rural and/or community transport. Covid-19 has resulted in a widening of the digital divide affecting older people who may not be familiar with technology.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
9. We will work with our partners to ensure that the needs of older and disabled people, who reside in rural communities, are considered in service developments or by	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	• Increased awareness of the needs of older people who live rurally. • Raised awareness of best practice in overcoming rural inequality and providing adequate and appropriate mitigations.	

promoting and monitoring the use of the Rural Needs Toolkit for Health and Social Care and completing Rural Needs Impact Assessments to identify mitigations put in place.		Increased number of rural needs impact assessments, where appropriate, which evidence consideration of rurality in service design and service change with reduction in any potential inequality for those living in rural areas.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Rural Needs Toolkit for HSC staff available. Support provided for completion of RN templates by service leads. Annual RN report submitted to DAERA			
We know that people may be reluctant to share their sexual orientation with health professionals and are unhappy having to disclose their sexual orientation repeatedly. We have also found that some people have had a negative experience when accessing health and social care services.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
10. We will implement the Rainbow Badge initiative whereby staff will complete online training to gain a HSC Rainbow Badge. This is a voluntary initiative. The badge will be used to symbolise an open, non-judgemental and inclusive place for people that identify as LGBTQ+.	April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Adoption of Rainbow Badge initiative to ensure regional consistency. - Monitor the number of staff taking part in the initiative. - Gather feedback from staff and service users.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Being implemented at a local level			

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
11. We will develop a resource for staff comprising professional body guidance on best practice for inclusion for people who are LGBTQ+.	April 2025	• Guidance available for health and social care professionals. • Increased staff understanding of improving access to services for LGBTQ+ service users. • Reduction in complaints and increase in compliments.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion /AD Nursing and midwifery Update: Work currently paused by DoH. HSCNI Trusts await outcome from ECNI consultation (Trusts responded to the ECNI consultation on this matter).			

Section 3 – Supporting our staff

We know that our staff are our most valuable resource and the health and social care system in Northern Ireland is indebted to the work that they do every day and in particular, throughout the pandemic. We are committed to celebrating and embracing the diversity of our staff and to ensuring that they feel able to bring their authentic selves to work so that they feel valued and can continue to provide safe, effective and compassionate health and social care services.

We have one of the most ethnically diverse workforces in the public sector and it is vital that we continue to promote the inclusion and visibility of staff who come from ethnically diverse backgrounds.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
12. We will support the ongoing work of Trusts' ethnically diverse networks.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan Ongoing at a local level	• Action plans developed to oversee Trusts' strategies on EDI for staff. • Policies reviewed, developed and recommended relating to EDI. • Internal and external EDI groups and networks better engaged. • Stronger links across the region between our Ethnically Diverse Staff Networks.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Successful Family Fun Event took place in October 2025 delivered in partnership with the staff network and ABC Community Network. Regular communications with staff network, hosted a number of IEN workshop, TofR for the staff network REaCH to be reviewed 26/27. Work on going in relation to Diversity Champions within N&M in line with NIPEC recommendations. Head of EDI Co-Chair of NIPEC project board into career development and promotional opportunities for internally educated nurses, midwives and health care assistants. Head of EDI attended the end of course event for PROGRESS and listened to feedback.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
13. We will develop a Cultural Competency training and awareness programme for staff	March 2025 Achieved – event 5 Feb 2025	• A co-produced package of e learning is developed and made available for staff to access. • Staff access to supporting resources. • Deeper understanding of the key issues to help create a more inclusive environment for all.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion / Promoting Well being team Update: Regional Cultural Competency framework launch event held 5 February 2025 Online training and booklet developed to run alongside f2f training for staff. Further to the launch of the Cultural Competency Framework, continued development led to the updating of the previous mental health toolkit for ethnic minority communities (2014). To further enhance inclusive mental health care, a new Practitioners Toolkit 'Mental Health and Ethnic Minority Groups' has been launched.			
We know that there are still incidents of homophobia in the workplace towards staff who are LGBTQ+ and we know that there is an under-declaration amongst staff who record their sexual orientation as LGBTQ+.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
14. We will continue to work in partnership with LGBTQ+ representative organisations to ensure that training and awareness raising resources are consistent and up to date.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	• Training developed to support staff to increase understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences. • Staff access to supporting resources. • Deeper understanding of the key issues LGBTQ+ people face to help create an inclusive environment for all. • Increased knowledge of appropriate language and policies that support inclusion.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Link established between regional staff forum and SHSCT staff forum representative. Regular discussions ongoing to agree approach to promoting the forum.			
Pop up stand in CAH and DHH to promote the Forum in July 25, showcased by Trust Comms. Positive engagement. EDI reps attended Pride parade in Belfast along with regional LGBTQ+ staff forum.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
15. We will promote the regional HSC LGBTQ+ network for staff across Trusts.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Increased awareness and celebration of LGBTQ+ diversity. - Space provided for LGBTQ+ staff peer support. - Improve experience for LGBTQ+ staff by providing access to support. - Increased understanding of LGBTQ+ inclusion. - LGBTQ experiences more visible in the wider organisation.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: As above			
Informal/family carers represent a significant proportion of the working population. A growing number of people working in health and social care are trying to balance their jobs and their caring responsibilities. The entitlement to carers' leave and flexible working arrangements are two of the main support measures that can help informal/family carers to keep a balance between their work lives and caring.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
16. We will improve awareness of options for flexible working, work-life balance, special leave policies to ensure they are accessible to all our staff.	April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Establish baseline on uptake of flexible working and monitor year on year staff accessing these opportunities. - Increased awareness of flexible working, work-life balance and special leave policies. - Monitoring reports produced twice a year on flexible working.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Ongoing promotion and awareness of flexible working options through HR Hub. Annual uptake / stats gathered for APR ECNI report.			

It is important that staff who have or acquire a disability are supported in the workplace by overcoming any potential barriers to achieving their full potential. Trusts are committed to creating a safe and welcoming environment for all staff.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
17. We will scope development of Staff Disability Forums and Networks to support regional consistency.	March 2024 Completed March 2026	Effective implementation and widespread use of Disability Passport.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Workplace adjustment plan (previously referred to as a Disability Passport) is integral with the new regional policy for Managing Sickness Absence. Will be progressed at a regional level and local implementation will be supported by EDI. Engagement with ValuABLE network successful. Supporting documents (Workplace Adjustment Plan & Neurodiversity Toolkit) drafted. Also included in regional Disability Equality policy.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
18. We will develop an individual plan in partnership with disabled staff members to ensure they are supported through the provision of reasonable adjustments where appropriate.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Better support for disabled staff to return and remain in work. - Record available of what has been agreed previously to support disabled staff member if changing role. Guidance available for managers on how to support disabled staff member.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Disability passport will be integral with the new regional policy for Supporting Attendance at Work and will be referred to as a Workplace Adjustment Plan. Disability Equality policy under review SOP developed to help guide managers supporting putting reasonable adjustments in place.			

Health and social care staff must have the foundation of effective policies and relevant training to support them to provide the most inclusive and compassionate health and social care services.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
19. We will develop a regional policy framework to ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies are reviewed in line with governance requirements.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies reviewed. - Policies reflective of up to date advice and best practice from the Equality Commission and other legislative developments. - Regional consistency in EDI policies and equity for all staff across the Trusts.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Regional EDI and Disability Policies currently under review with regional TUS and regional Employment Equality Group.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
20. We will update the regional HSC 'Making a Difference' e-learning programme further to review of best practice in E-learning and EDI training.	April 2028	- Regional HSC Making a Difference e-learning programme updated. - Updated training incorporated best practice identified.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Programme and accompanying booklet still to be updated, Regional Employment Equality Group will also be involved. Link to the Cultural Competency/Human Rights training to be added to the training programme. Contact to be made with original supplier to ascertain costs and timescales.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
21. We will work to improve uptake of equality training, which is mandatory in all Trusts.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Uptake of statutory mandatory equality training monitored. - Increased compliance levels with mandatory equality training. - Increased awareness of zero tolerance approach to racial harassment/ discrimination/ bullying and abuse at work.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Regular review of training compliance. Alternative delivery methods explored. How to report a hate crime resource available on sharepoint.			

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
22. We will identify an EDI Champion at a senior level in each Trust.	April 2025	- Identified lead on EDI at senior level. - EDI Champion (Geraldine Browne SHSCT) at senior level identified in each Trust.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Geraldine Browne, Chair of the People and Culture Committee has been appointed EDI champion for Southern Health and Social Care Trust.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
23. We will work in partnership with trade unions to ensure that staff who experience domestic and sexual violence are supported in the workplace.	April 2026	- Trust domestic and sexual violence workplace policy in place and support networks established. - Positive feedback from ongoing engagement from affected staff.	
Responsible: Human Resources Update: Trust Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Policy, along with updated guidance, support and resources for employees and managers, was reviewed and refreshed during the year. This includes the introduction of a short period of paid special leave, 'safe leave' for the purpose of dealing with issues related to domestic and sexual violence and abuse.			
Personal stories can really resonate and be most impactful in terms of effectively communicating key messages. We recognise that collaborating with people with lived experience enhances the training we provide and gives staff a different perspective, improving the services we provide.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
24. We will engage with external experts and representative organisations to provide specialist training for employees	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Training sessions developed delivered and evaluated. - Marketing and promotional strategy to increase uptake of training across all Trusts.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Currently within training sessions for staff include:			

Deaf Equality Awareness Training can be delivered by the British Deaf Association. Disability Awareness Training and Neurodiversity Awareness Training delivered by Employers for Disability NI. Disability Training delivered by EDI and Disability Advocate			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
25. We will develop a human rights based training programme and guidance for staff providing care for people living in residential settings. We will share and actively promote these resources with Independent Sector colleagues, who may also provide this care.	April 2025 Completed	- Increased awareness and competence in providing person centred, person led care and what a human rights based approach. - Evaluation of training and associated resources.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: FREDA animation produced and shared.  World Human Rights Day 10 Dece HSC, FREDA Animation on Vimeo			

We want to harness the talents of a diverse workforce and recognise that we need to take a proactive approach in improving access to health and social care employment for marginalised Section 75 groups.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
26. We will develop actions in line with legislative provision to improve access to those Section 75 groups, where there is a low representation in our workforce.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Improved access to employment for marginalised Section 75 groups. - Equality data indicating better representation.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Regional discussions ongoing at Regional Employment Equality Group regarding accessibility of employment in HSC. Implementation of local actions to be supported. Trusts continue to submit Article 55 reports annually on workforce. A development course has been developed for HSC Ethnically Diverse staff by HSC leadership centre PROGRESS.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
27. We will address specific health inequalities for staff, for example provide menopause information sessions and celebrate men's health week to promote inclusion and visibility of gender specific issues in the workforce.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Raised awareness of gender specific health inequalities for staff. - Increased inclusion and visibility of gender specific issues. - Better support for staff with gender specific issues.	
Responsible: Promoting Well-being team Update: The Staff Wellbeing Team highlight and address health inequalities through the weekly Friday Focus messages and Southern I magazine. Subject matter experts have provided information. Health fairs organised included specially for Carers and Staff Menopause Awareness continues, Men's Health, International Men's Day and International Women's Day. The Physical Activity Lead within Promoting Wellbeing devised and implemented Staff Walking Challenges in May and November 2025. These Walking Challenges raise awareness of the huge benefits of walking and encourage and support staff to increase their steps both at home and in the office.			

The challenge enthuses and reminds staff of how small walking every day can make a huge difference to their health & wellbeing. Feedback from staff shows how the step challenge motivates their walking and movement both in work and at home, increases team camaraderie and provides peer support to walk more on dark nights in November. The step challenges in May & November form part of the Trust's wider commitment to staff health & wellbeing Every Move Counts!!

Also the Workplace Wellbeing Team delivered four staff health and wellbeing fairs across four Trust sites from August 2025 to March 2026. These events provided staff with accessible opportunities to engage with wellbeing information, resources and support in an inclusive and supportive environment. The fairs brought together internal services and partners to promote key wellbeing themes and signpost staff to available supports. Attendance reached over 700 staff. Feedback highlighted the value of face-to-face engagement and the increased visibility of wellbeing support at local level, helping to shape future wellbeing activity.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
28. We will work collaboratively on the forthcoming gender pay gap legislation and determine appropriate methods of monitoring and reporting.	Dependant on enactment of legislation.	Pay structure established that ensures fairness and equity in pay and reward arrangements.	
Responsible: Human Resources Update: Await the publication of the DfC public consultation outcome report (closed Feb 2025). Proposal is to include not only gender monitoring and reporting but also race and disability – similar to what happens in rest of UK. Initial Draft Regional Consultation Response drafted for submission.			

Section 4 – Supporting informal/family carers

We know that many of us are likely to become a carer at some point in life and informal/family carers cover a great part of care needs, often called the ‘invisible workforce’. Strengthening the voice and representation of informal carers is the first step to address the challenges facing informal carers. Informal care can be physically and mentally demanding, resulting in carers often feeling exhausted, lonely, and strained. Carer Co-ordinators in each Trust area work collaboratively with carers to develop an accessible carer support and short break programme. The Trusts also work with community and voluntary organisations to ensure carers can be signposted to support in their local area.

Recognition of the key role a carer plays is essential and we must provide support when the caring role is having a negative impact on the health and well-being of the informal/family carer. It is also important to make useful information and training easily accessible and available to informal carers.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
29. We will work collectively to ensure that carers across the region are aware that they can have access to a conversation with their named worker in relation to their caring role and needs. The conversation is carer led and encourages both staff and carers to take time to discuss the caring role.		• Increased uptake of carers’ assessments. • Improved carer experience of the carer assessment process. • Carers across Northern Ireland receive the same information and know where to get help and support. • Increase in people who identify as carers, which will enable them to link into supports available. • Quarterly DoH monitoring.	
Responsible: Carers Co-ordinators Update: Carers Support and Engagement (2025–2026) The Trust Carers Co-ordinators play a key role in supporting unpaid carers by proactively identifying carers’ needs and working alongside staff teams to develop services and actions that respond effectively to those needs. The Co-ordinators work in close partnership with carer groups, organisations and representative forums across the voluntary and community sector, as well as with statutory services, to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to carer support. This collaborative working helps ensure that carers’ voices are heard, valued and acted upon.			

During engagement activities, Carers Co-ordinators engaged with over 500 carers, staff and key stakeholders. This engagement identified seven key priority areas for the new carers action plan:

- Communication
- Navigating the care system and services
- Short breaks / respite
- Health and wellbeing
- Valuing carers
- Training
- Young carers

Building on this learning, the SHSCT Carers Action Plan 2025–2028 has been developed as a delivery framework for change. The Action Plan sets out clear, measurable actions aligned to each priority area and identifies how the Trust will work collaboratively with partners to improve carers' experiences, resilience and wellbeing. Progress against the Action Plan will be monitored to demonstrate impact, support continuous improvement, and provide assurance that carers' needs are being addressed in a meaningful and sustainable way across the SHSCT area.

The Carers Co-ordinators worked in collaboration with a range of internal departments and external partner organisations to plan and deliver a comprehensive programme of activities for Carers Week. With different events for carers delivered throughout the SHSCT from Monday 9th June to Sunday 15th June 2025, with the theme "Caring About Equality". The focus of this campaign was highlighting the inequalities faced unpaid carers regarding health, finances, opportunities and aiming to build a fairer society with better support for carers.

Carers Week continues to provide a significant annual opportunity to raise awareness of unpaid carers across health, social care and community settings, while also strengthening partnerships that support carers at a local and regional level.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
30. We will hold an annual event on Carers Rights Day to highlight care and caring and help informal/family carers understand their rights and	November 2024 and annually thereafter	• Consistent, regional approach to Carers Rights Day.	

find out about support that may be available.			
Responsible: Carers Co-ordinators Update: During Carers Week 2025, 3 events were held throughout the Trust area. The events included a wide range of information stands, complimentary therapies and a workshop. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) has delivered a wide and varied programme of support for informal and family carers across the Trust area, focusing on health and wellbeing, physical activity, peer connection and access to information. A range of community-based and online initiatives have been offered to ensure carers can access support that reduces isolation, promotes wellbeing and recognises the demands of the caring role. To support physical health and social connection, SHSCT facilitated over 50 activity-based programmes across the 3 trust localities including weekly Walk and Talk groups, Chair Yoga, strength and balance classes, IndepenDance and circus skills programmes for carers. These activities provided carers with accessible opportunities to maintain physical health, reduce stress and connect with others who share similar experiences. A strong emphasis was also placed on emotional wellbeing and peer support. This included Carers Drop-In sessions, coffee mornings, social cafés, museum trips, cooking programmes and seasonal celebrations such as Christmas get-togethers. Programmes such as <i>Bend Don't Break</i>, <i>Parenting Plus: Special Needs Adolescent Programme</i>, sessions supported carers' resilience, coping skills and emotional wellbeing over structured multi-week interventions. In addition, SHSCT ensured carers had the opportunity to access over 10 different information, advice and skills development programmes through Carers Co-ordinator Clinics, Wellbeing Wednesday sessions (both in-person and online), digital skills and digital training workshops, autism bus experiences and online wellbeing cafés. These sessions helped carers to better understand their rights, navigate services, build confidence with digital tools and connect with Trust staff and partner organisations in an accessible and supportive environment. Furthermore the SHSCT demonstrated a strong commitment to raising awareness, recognition and visibility of carers through the delivery of large-scale Carers Rights Day events and Carers Week celebrations. These standalone events provided a clear platform to highlight carers as a priority equality group, ensuring carers were informed of their rights, entitlements and the supports available to them across health, social care and the voluntary sector.			

DISABILITY ACTION PLAN 2024 – 2029

Southern Health & Social Care Trust Update March 2026



Introduction

This Plan sets out the actions the Health and Social Care Trusts will take forward collaboratively over the next five years.

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 the Plan on an ongoing basis and provide annual reports against progress.

What is in our Disability Action Plan

The following tables outline 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 our website or by contacting the Equality Team.

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.

There is a need for greater visibility of disabled people.

Action	By When	How we will measure success	
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	- Increased visibility of disabled people and disabled staff, including those with hidden disability in Trust publications, use of social media and online presence. - Proactive promotion and communication of our co-production with disabled people and disability-related events.	
Responsible: Communications. Update: range of images used throughout the Trust.			
Action	By When	How will we measure success	
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	- Co-produced calendar of events organised and publicised annually. - Increased staff awareness of disability equality.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: 3 December 2025 – International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Hosted a successful event with the valuABLE Network which included a Schwartz round to support staff reflection and shared learning. The valuABLE Staff Network continues to grow and maintain strong, active links with the Disability Advocate, ensuring staff voices informs organisational disability inclusion priorities. A comprehensive Diversity & Inclusion Calendar is in place and accessible via the EDI Sharepoint. The Calendar includes significant dates relating to cultural/religious diversity as well as disability awareness events and various identity celebration dates which are significant to our diverse workforce. Staff Network ValuABLE continues to grow, strong connection to work of Disability Advocate.			
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.			
Action	By When	How will we measure success	
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.	March 2025	- Increased awareness of the accessible Disability Action Plan internally and externally. - Disability Action Plan available on Trust websites and internal intranets, including Easy Read and Signed versions - Proactively disseminate the Disability Action Plan to key stakeholders. - Co-produced resource explaining the disability duties and legislative requirements.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion			

Update: Plan including easyread and signed version on Trust website. Action complete			
All health and social care staff should be trained on disability equality and disability duties.			
Action	By When	How we will measure success	
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.	March 2025 and review Annually	• Evaluation of training completed. • Feedback on training gathered from staff to inform the evaluation. • Increased awareness of disability duties. • Co-production of training resources on disability equality and disability duties. • United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) guide for HSC staff updated.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism - elearning for healthcare Disability training being developed with the Trust Disability Advocate.			

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.

Disabled people want to be clear on how they can get involved, be heard and inform decisions.

Action	By when	How will we measure success	
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.	March 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	• Development of a specific database of disabled people and organisations and determine the best way for them to be involved. • Consultee database reviewed and updated annually. • 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.	

		• Promotion of Trust Involvement Teams and involvement opportunities with disabled people and representative groups. • Use of alt text in our social media.	
Responsible: User involvement team Update: Information from Trusts is available in alternative formats. User involvement opportunities shared regularly with service users and carers. Involvement opportunities are promoted via the Trust website, internal networks, and the Public Health Agency's "Engage" platform. The Trust Involvement Team continues to work closely with disabled people and representative organisations to identify and address barriers to participation. Efforts are ongoing to update the Trust's consultee database, enhance the accessibility of our digital content (including the use of alt text on social media), and raise awareness of the support available through Involvement Teams to encourage greater engagement by disabled individuals. The Recovery College has four Peer Educators in the team. Peer Educators have lived mental health experience. Within their roles they support decision making, coproduce and co-facilitate mental health and wellbeing workshops, and guide students on their recovery journey. The Recovery College has many volunteers with mental health and physical health conditions. Volunteers also engage in coproduction by engaging in meetings regarding future plans for the College and creating/facilitating workshops, alongside Peer Educators and Mental Health Professionals.			
Action	By When	How will we measure success	
6. We will work in partnership with relevant key organisations and individuals to identify advocacy services.	March 2025	• 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.	

Responsible: User Involvement Team Update: ongoing, has been delayed due to other pressures.			
Action	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	Annual meeting with members of Regional Disabled People's Forum.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Equality Lead representative attends Regional Disabled People's Forum when requested.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
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	- Review of membership of forums and user groups completed. - Gaps identified where increased representation of disabled people on user groups and forums is required.	
Responsible: User involvement team Update: The Trust continues to promote the inclusion of individuals with lived experience of disability across its service user forums and project groups. Efforts have focused on strengthening representation by ensuring that individuals and representative organisations with relevant experience are actively recruited and supported to contribute meaningfully.			

Staff across the Trust receive ongoing guidance on the importance of involving people with lived experience, with particular emphasis on how their contributions shape service design and delivery. Involvement opportunities are promoted using the individual's preferred method of contact, ensuring accessibility and responsiveness to diverse needs.

Where required, reasonable adjustments are made to remove barriers to participation, enabling disabled individuals to contribute on an equal basis.

Consultation methods must be accessible to disabled people.

Action	By when	How we will measure success	
9. We will ensure that all consultations are inclusive, targeted and use appropriate methods to ensure participation of a wide range of disabled people.	April 2025 and throughout the lifetime of the plan	• 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. • Consultation processes designed to be as inclusive as possible from the outset. • Focused consultation with disabled participants as required. • Improved opportunities for disabled people to engage with and influence policy-makers. • Methods and tools used for online involvement will allow disabled people to participate on a fair and equal basis.	

Responsible: User Involvement team

Update: Trusts use a variety of methods for consultation to ensure they are inclusive and information is available in alternative formats throughout the process. Venues for events are accessible, Trusts have e.g. ensured changing places are available, various consultation methods are used including face to face, online meetings etc.

Information can be made available in a range of alternative formats, including Easy Read, large print, and signed video, to accommodate a wide variety of communication needs.

Trust staff are supported to apply accessibility standards consistently, ensuring that all engagement activities are planned with inclusion in mind. This approach reflects our ongoing commitment to eliminating barriers and enhancing the voice of disabled people in shaping health and social care services.

It is the responsibility of HSC staff to book communication support for people who are D/deaf and Hard of Hearing

Action	By when	How will measure success	
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	• Regional consistency and equity of access to communication support for people who are Deaf/deaf or have hearing loss. • Improved access to communication support for people who are Deaf/deaf or Hard of Hearing. • Increased awareness of HSC staff of need to provide communication support. • Reduction in complaints about lack of communication support available/provided.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & inclusion

Update: Regional meeting held in September 25, arranged by SPPG, posters to be developed for each Trust.

Task and Finish group was established and led by SPPG to progress equality and accessibility priorities for deaf service users. Staff and service-user posters were co-produced with regional colleagues and advocacy representatives and formally launched during Sign Language Awareness Week to promote awareness and uptake of the SignVideo service.

A further regional Task and Finish Group was established to improve the handling of complaints from deaf service users. A standardised complaints flowchart was regionally agreed and distributed to support consistent and accessible practice.

Consideration should be given to the installation of Changing Places toilets in all hospitals in Northern Ireland.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
11. We will scope the availability of Changing Places and new facilities will be added in accordance with legislation.	April 2026	- Scoping of all facilities completed. - Gaps identified in relation to relevant legislation. - Improved access to HSC services for disabled people.	
Responsible: Trust Facilities/Estates Teams Update: accessibility issues are regularly raised with Estates Team. Trust Disability Advocate and valuABLE staff network providing feedback on areas such as accessible access and carparking.			
Staff need to understand how to involve disabled people in decisions they make about services.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
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 meaningful involvement.	April 2026	- 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. - Improved participation of disabled people in health and social care decisions.	
Responsible: User Involvement Team Update: The User Involvement Team continues to provide tailored advice and support to staff, service users, and carers to promote inclusive engagement practices across services. This includes advising on reasonable adjustments, such as the provision of materials in alternative formats, to ensure that disabled individuals can participate fully.			

While co-production sessions for the development of the formal guidance have not yet commenced, the Trust remains committed to progressing this work in partnership with disabled people and representative organisations during the next phase of the Action Plan.

Action	By when	How we will measure success	
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	- Effective participation masterclass developed in partnership with disabled people and representative organisations. - Masterclass held – one in each Trust area.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion

Update: a regional Disability Masterclass was held on 10th February 2026 led by the Belfast Trust. The session brought together staff, members of the D/deaf and people with a disability, advocates, and regional equality leads, whose participation helped strengthen cross-regional learning and collaboration.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. Participants felt the event was highly informative, impactful, and engaging, with particular praise for:

- Lived experience stories
- Practical tools such as Spoon Theory and inclusive communication tips
- Real-life examples of improving accessibility and PPI in practice

Many attendees reported feeling more confident in how they can adapt communication, service delivery, and decision-making to better support disabled people.

Policies need to be kept up to date and relevant, to support disabled staff to remain in the workplace.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
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	- Review of Disability Equality Policy completed in partnership with disabled staff. - Revised regional policy in place.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Currently under review with regional Trade Union colleagues.			
Action	By when	How we will measure success	
15. We will review and update our Disability Toolkit.	March 2025	- Updated Disability Toolkit in place. - Policy and Toolkit reviewed and amended in partnership with disabled staff.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: HSC Disability Toolkit currently under regional review.			
Action	By when	How we will measure success	
16. We will engage with disabled staff to ensure they have a voice and influence the support we provide.	March 2025	Method of ongoing engagement established in each Trust area.	

Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update Workplace Adjustment Plan has been developed – this will provide a framework to guide conversations around how disabilities can affect our staff in carrying out their role and what reasonable adjustments can be considered/implemented. Disability Advocate in place Staff network valuable meets regularly			
There is a need for more opportunities for disabled people to gain employment within health and social care.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
17. We will work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to review our employability schemes and placement schemes to enhance employment opportunities.	March 2026	• Opportunities and availability of our employability schemes and placement schemes scoped. • Plans developed to enable and support employment placements and work experience for disabled people across each Trust.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: Ongoing			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
18. We will work to reduce barriers to recruitment in health and social care for disabled people.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	• Barriers to recruitment in health and social care identified in partnership with disabled people and representative organisations.	

		Development of actions, in line with the legislative provisions and supported by equality data, to improve access to employment for disabled people.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion/regional Update: SET Neurodiversity Guide Linking with C&V sector Reasonable adjustments SOP and guidance.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
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.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	- Method for disabled applicants to apply for HSC jobs available. - Better communication with disabled applicants who require adjustments or support with their application.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: A Guide has been produced regionally re accessibility for the HSCRecruit website. Applications are accepted in Accessibility statement for HSCNIRecruit - Accessibility statement for HSC Jobs - Application Portal - HSCNI Jobs Accessibility contact for SHSCT listed.			
There is a need to improve visibility and awareness of jobs for anyone who is disabled.			
Action	By when	How we will measure success	

20. We will work towards Disability Positive Accreditation for all Trusts.	March 2029	- Disability Positive Accreditation achieved. - Increased awareness among disabled people of HSC jobs available.	
Responsible: Equality Diversity & Inclusion Update: As above			
Better data on service users communication support needs is required.			
Action	By when	How will we measure success	
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	- Communication support needs are recorded on the ENCOMPASS system. - Improved communication and access to services.	
Responsible: Encompass team Update: We continue to work with encompass and monitor service user feedback. Sensory/communication issues are flagged on encompass and visible to all professionals involved, regardless of where the individual presents within the Trust. Communication needs information is readily accessible so staff can proactively make adjustments e.g. book interpreters, arrange a suitable environment to meet or prepare accessible information e.g. large print, easy read etc. encompass system aligns with Improvement through Involvement, ensuring the individuals preferences, communication and support needs and experiences are at the centre of care planning and service delivery. The Encompass system has helped with standardising forms and sensory support registers to reduce variations.			

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16. We will engage with disabled staff to ensure they have a voice and influence the support we provide.	March 2025	Method of ongoing engagement established in each Trust area.	
Action	By when	How will we measure success	

22. We will support the involvement of disabled people and representative organisations in the roll out of ENCOMPASS.	Throughout the lifetime of the plan	Improved engagement with disabled people 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>	
Responsible: encompass team Update: The Patient Engagement Council (PEC) meets monthly. This forum provides an opportunity for proactive insight and feedback on patient experience of the My Care app. The PEC provides a strong feedback loop to the My Care Build Team and to My Care Helpdesk for continuous service improvement. The aim is to increase and expand the diversity of voice/intake and organisations involved in Patient Engagement (e.g. – easy read guide/signed and captioned video). A Patient Disability and Accessibility Advisory Sub-Group has been established to better address specific matters of accessibility improvement.			

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 Equality Diversity & Inclusion Team.

