



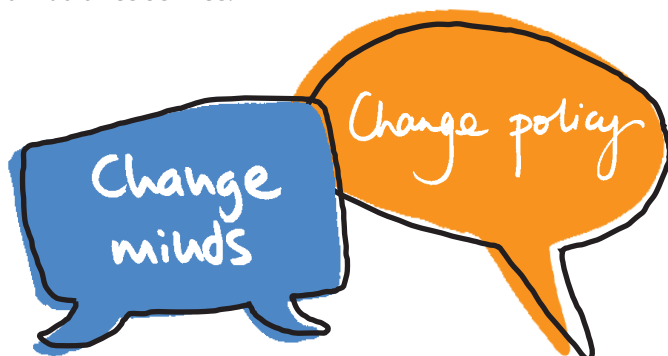
How health services work in Northern Ireland

What's this fact sheet for?

It's important for you to make your voice heard when it comes to health services. Whether the feedback is positive or negative, things only change for the better if you get involved. But to make it count, it helps to know how the system works and where decisions get made. This is a quick overview to help make sense of it all (See Figure 1).

What's the overall structure?

In Northern Ireland, the NHS is referred to as the HSC (short for Health and Social Care). It's overseen at a government level by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Health and Social Care Board commissions services through five Local Commissioning Groups, and the services are then provided by five Health and Social Care Trusts. A separate NI Ambulance Trust looks after the ambulance service.



The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

This is the government department ultimately in charge of health services in Northern Ireland. It has three main responsibilities:

- Health & Social Care: setting policy and legislation for hospitals, family practitioner services and community health and personal social services
- Public Health: managing policy, legislation and administrative action to promote and protect the health and well-being of the population
- Public Safety: setting policy and legislation for fire and rescue services.

Health and Social Care (HSC)

The HSC's responsibilities cover health services and social care services including home care, family and children's services, day care and social work. It delivers these through the Health and Social Care Board.

Health and Social Care Board

This is the body that actually commissions the services. It does this through five Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs), covering the same geographical areas as the Trusts (see Figure 1). The HSC Board takes the lead in managing resources and monitoring performance within the five Health and Social Care Trusts. But its responsibilities also go beyond that to services not covered by the Health and Social Care Trusts – including GPs, dentists, opticians and community pharmacists. Ambulance services in Northern Ireland are provided by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Trust.

Health and Social Care Trusts

These five Trusts provide health and social services across Northern Ireland. They cover Belfast, South Eastern, Southern, Northern and Western. While the Board commissions services, it's the Trusts that provide them 'on the ground'. Each Trust manages its own staff and services and controls its own budget.

The Public Health Agency

This is another body worth knowing about. Established in April 2009, it's the major regional organisation for health protection and health and social wellbeing improvement. The main aim is to address inequalities in health care provision.



Figure 1: How health services work in Northern Ireland

