

Stabilise Services Strengthen Staffing

Manifesto 2027



The RCPsych in Northern Ireland policy priorities for the 2027 Assembly election:

Priority 1.

Build a Sustainable Mental Health Workforce

We call for a **significant expansion of psychiatry training posts at both core and higher levels** to develop a workforce capable of meeting future demand. Addressing psychiatrist shortages requires investment in training and retention, not simply filling vacancies. A sustainable workforce is essential to ensuring timely access to high-quality mental health care across all services.

As of December 2023, almost three-fifths of those on waiting lists (over 10,000 people) had been on a mental health waiting list for longer than the 9 and 13- week maximum target time¹. **Providing compassionate and safe mental health services requires investment in Northern Ireland's psychiatry workforce.** Chronically understaffed services and those under constant pressure have adverse effects on admission thresholds, discharge decisions and continuity of care.



29%

2025 Consultant
Psychiatrist
vacancy rate*

34%

2025 SAS
Psychiatrist
vacancy rate*

Northern Ireland has not received investment, by way of expansion, in psychiatry training places since 2007. 10 non-recurrent training posts were introduced in 2025/26, however these were created through the reallocation of part time underspend, rather than new investment. We welcome this reallocation of resource, however even with 100% recruitment to training posts, the scheme is not producing enough psychiatrists to replace retiring consultants and SAS Psychiatrists. Addressing the workforce gap will require sustained investment in the Northern Ireland training scheme and a further increase in training capacity.

The need for Mental Health services continues to increase

+30%

increase in people waiting for a first mental health appointment



March 2019

13,500

December 2023

17,500



+4000 more people waiting since 2019

*Number of people waiting for first appointment

"Waiting lists for mental health services are rising at unacceptable levels"

Consultant and SAS Psychiatrist locum spend 2024-2026



£10,263,482

In 2024/25 Northern Ireland spent £10,263,482 on Locum an anticipated spend

£11,525,000²

In 2025/26 anticipated spend of £11,525,000**

Psychiatrist vacancies remain critically high 2017 to 2025

CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRISTS



SAS PSYCHIATRISTS



Expansion in Psychiatry Training Places Across The UK

30

Scotland Trainee Psychiatrist Expansion since 2022

0*

NI Trainee Psychiatrist Expansion since 2007*

15

Wales Trainee Psychiatrist Expansion since 2022

679

England Trainee Psychiatrist Expansion since 2022

*2025/26 training post increase (x10) created through the reallocation of existing LTFT resources rather than new investment ** denotes approximate forecast calculation based on 6 month actual figures received.

Priority 2.

Deliver Equitable Mental Health Services for All

Every person should have access to the same high standard of mental health services, regardless of where they live. **We continue to advocate for parity of provision with physical health and prioritisation, ensuring mental health services are consistently and equitably available across all of Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts.**

Reducing unwarranted variation in care will improve patient outcomes, reduce pressure on emergency departments and primary care, and create a more resilient health system.

Northern Ireland (NI) has the lowest mental health spending per capita in the UK, at approximately £212 per person, compared to £264 in England¹⁴. This is 80% of the spend for 125% of the need, which means that per mentally ill person we spend only 64% of what England spends.

Mental illness is widely recognised as **one of the four most significant causes of ill-health and disability in Northern Ireland** alongside cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and cancer³ - heavily driven by **higher baseline rates of anxiety and mood disorders** compared to the rest of Europe⁴.



Northern Ireland
**invests up to £44 less
per person** on mental
health care than
neighbouring nations.

Mental Health services continue to be chronically underfunded at a lower level than in the rest of the UK, and we call for parity of resource as well as parity of provision and esteem.

Our physical and mental health are inextricably linked. Those with long-term physical health conditions are also likely to experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety; with research showing us that people with long-term physical conditions are more than twice as likely to develop mental health problems. Waiting lists and waiting times in mental health services are unacceptable, and are contributing to increased acuity in presentation, increased personal suffering and making conditions harder and more costly to treat.

Mental ill-health takes a massive toll on the NI population, with the **overall financial and economic cost conservatively estimated at £3.4 billion annually⁶**.

Northern Ireland has the lowest per-capita mental health funding of all four nations and the Republic Of Ireland

Mental Health Spend Per Person

Source: References 8-13



Priority 3.

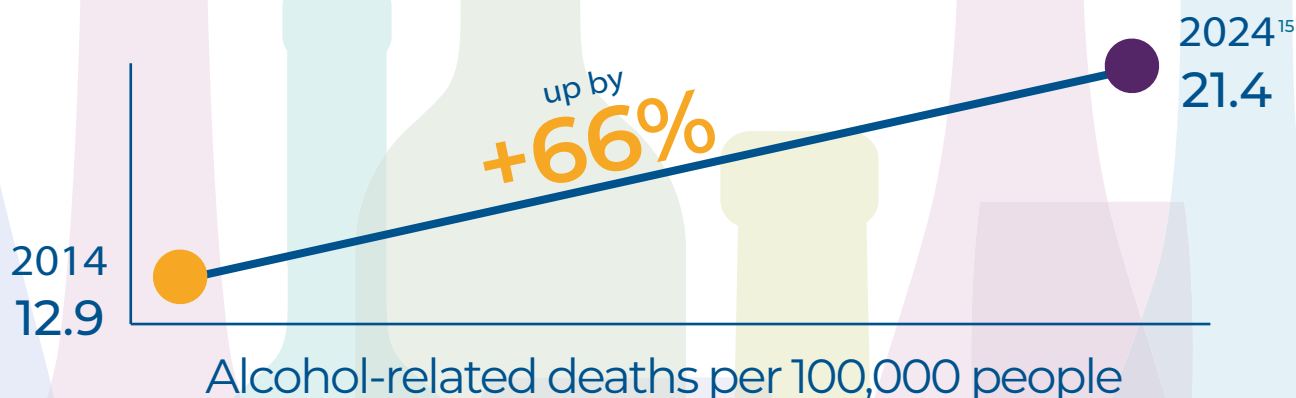
Tackle Health Inequalities: Introduce Minimum Unit Pricing

Public health measures, including minimum unit pricing for alcohol, should be recognised as effective tools for improving population and individual health and reducing the burden of preventable mental illness and addiction.

Mental health policy must be informed by robust data and focused on reducing health inequalities. We support the use of clear workforce and service data, alongside information on disease prevalence to identify gaps in provision and drive targeted investment.

Investment in mental health, both treatment and prevention, pays dividends in terms of a healthier, more productive society; and we call for clear data to be gathered and made public to show how improving the mental health of Northern Ireland is good for the country as well as the individual.

In Northern Ireland we consistently record the highest rate of alcohol-specific deaths across the UK.¹⁴ A situation that continues to worsen year on year.



Minimum unit pricing
reduces the burden of
preventable mental illness
and addiction.

About the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland (RCPsych NI)

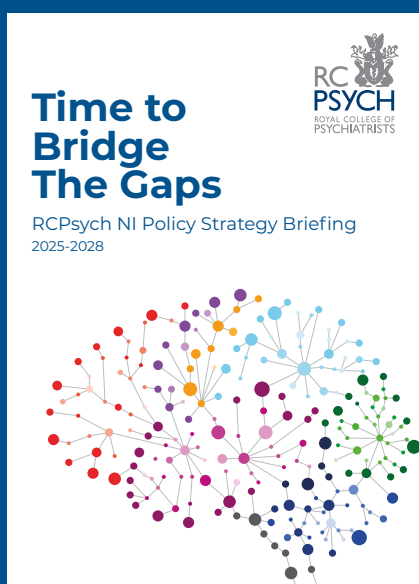
RCPsych in Northern Ireland works to secure the best outcomes for people with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, and developmental disorders by promoting excellent mental health services, supporting the prevention of mental illness, training, setting standards and being the voice of psychiatry.

As the professional medical body for psychiatry in Northern Ireland, we set standards and promote excellence in psychiatry and mental healthcare. RCPsychNI is the voice of the profession and we:

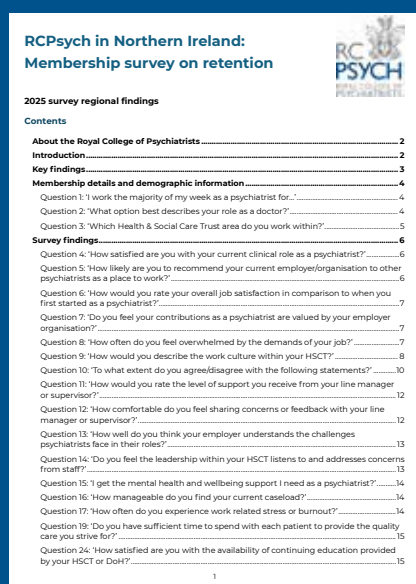
- Campaign for resources to address the complex and multifactorial issues that serve to cause the treatment gap, including disproportionately low funding levels, an under-resourced workforce, and fragmented services.
- Ensure that the Northern Ireland Executive is held to account for improving mental health services, including inequity of access, experience and outcomes for the citizens of NI.
- Ensure that the NI health system delivers parity and improvements in access and outcomes.
- Speak up for the needs of our members, their patients, and their families.

Recent RCPsych in NI Publications

Time To Bridge The Gaps (2025)



Workforce Retention Survey (2026)



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References

¹ Public Accounts Committee - Report on Mental Health Services in NI

² Results page 1 - WhatDoTheyKnow

³ 00293490 - Mental Health Report_WEB.pdf

⁴ Public Accounts Committee - Report on Mental Health Services in NI

⁵ 00293490 - Mental Health Report_WEB.pdf

⁶ Public Accounts Committee - Report on Mental Health Services in NI

⁷ The NI Mental Health Strategy A Review of the deliverability of the Strategys Actions 2026-2029 - FINAL.pdf

⁸ DoH SPPG July 25

⁹ Welsh Parliament Budget and MIND March 24

¹⁰ Scottish Government March 24

¹¹ Dail Eireann July 25 Funding of €1480 million using an exchange rate of €1 = £0.86

¹² NHS England Mental Health Dashboard 25

¹³ RCPsych MH Watch for 24-25

¹⁴ Alcohol-specific deaths in the UK - Office for National Statistics

¹⁵ Alcohol-specific deaths in the UK - Office for National Statistics