

NI Health Collective Response to Neighbourhood Model of Care (NMC).

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Health Collective, we are pleased to submit this briefing to the Department of Health as a consolidated response from NIHC members following recent engagement on the development of the Neighbourhood Model of Care¹. This briefing reflects the collective experience and insight of VCSE organisations working across health, social care and community health, and is offered in the spirit of partnership to support effective, rights-based and sustainable neighbourhood delivery. NIHC leadership and members remain committed to working constructively with the Department and system partners as the model moves from engagement into implementation.

Purpose of this Briefing:

This briefing is submitted by members of the Northern Ireland Health Collective (NIHC) following engagement on the development of the Neighbourhood Model of Care (NMC). It sets out the collective views of Voluntary; Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations working across health and social care and highlights the conditions NIHC members consider essential for effective and sustainable neighbourhood delivery.

Why This Matters Now:

NIHC members welcome the Department of Health's ambition to reform health and social care delivery through the Neighbourhood Model of Care, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and care closer to home. VCSE organisations are already playing a critical role in supporting people while they wait for care, addressing social determinants of health, and mitigating pressure on statutory services.

Members are clear, however, that without political clarity, fair resourcing and genuine partnership, there is a risk that neighbourhood delivery will replicate existing system pressures at a local level or transfer responsibility without the necessary support. Members also stress the importance of learning lessons from previous processes to support future collaborative working.

Strategic Contribution of the VCSE Sector:

VCSE organisations are deeply embedded within communities and trusted by individuals and families, least likely to engage with statutory services. They deliver prevention, mental health support, social prescribing, rehabilitation, reablement and social care support at scale, and form a critical part of the wider health and social care workforce.

The NMC presents an opportunity to formalise and sustain this contribution within neighbourhood delivery, rather than relying on short-term or crisis-driven responses.

¹ Collated NIHC Members views November – December 2025



NIHC Members' Conditions for Successful Neighbourhood Delivery

Governance and Partnership:

Integrated Neighbourhood Teams should operate within clear governance and decision-making arrangements, aligned with Area Integrated Partnership Boards, developing Mental Health Collaboratives and Community Planning Partnerships. VCSE representation must be meaningful and equitable, including grassroots and hyper-local organisations. These arrangements should be grounded in the Partnership Agreement between the government and the VCSE sector.

Fair Funding and Sustainability:

NIHC members are unequivocal that neighbourhood delivery will not succeed without fair, sustainable funding. This includes ring-fenced INT budgets for VCSE participation, multi-year funding with full-cost recovery, prompt payment and proportionate monitoring, in line with Fair Funding and Fair Work principles.

Workforce: Health, Social Care and Community:

Neighbourhood care relies on a blended workforce spanning statutory health services, social care, and the VCSE sector. Members emphasise the importance of alignment with the Social Care Workforce Strategy, All Ireland Standards for Community Work and the need to support recruitment, retention; provide equitable and joint education opportunities. We would advocate for the implementation of a trauma informed approach across organisations and across our partnership. We should ensure equity of approach across community and social care roles, including peer supporters, volunteers and those with lived experience.

Rights-Based and Participatory Delivery:

NIHC members emphasise the importance of a rights-based approach to neighbourhood care. Aligning with the values as agreed by the Joint Forum². Co-production with children (Lundy Model³) and the statutory duty through the Children's Services Cooperation Act (NI) 2015 should be promoted within NMC⁴. Co Design and involvement of people, their families and wider communities should be embedded as standard practice, supported by transparent feedback loops that demonstrate how engagement informs decision-making. Developing the approach of 'do with' people as partners as being led by Patient Client Council should be encouraged within NMC.⁵

Data, Digital Enablement and Accountability:

² [Partnership Agreement](#)

³ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/31c5ad34-8ac4-4c11-a037-25cc5e10a96a_en?filename=lundy_model_of_participation_0.pdf

⁴ [2403 The Children's Services Cooperation Act NI 2015 - March 2024.pdf](#)

⁵ [people-to-partners-final-for-print-081025.pdf](#)



VCSE visibility within shared systems is essential for safe and coordinated care. Data-sharing arrangements should be GDPR-compliant, proportionate and resourced, enabling referrals, outcome tracking, and neighbourhood dashboards that demonstrate access, equity and impact.

Priority Areas for Early Impact:

NIHC members identify mental health, social prescribing, long term condition management including community rehabilitation as key areas where neighbourhood delivery can demonstrate early value, reduce pressure on acute services and build confidence in the model through tangible outcomes. This is not an exhaustive list.

Key Risks Identified by NIHC Members

- Tokenistic partnership rather than genuine co-design and equitable partnerships.
- Unfunded transfer of responsibility to VCSE organisations
- Increased inequality due to variable neighbourhood capacity
- Additional strain on an already stretched social care, health and community workforce

Conclusion and Next Steps

NIHC members are prepared to engage constructively with the Department of Health and statutory partners to deliver neighbourhood care that is effective, equitable and sustainable. Members emphasise that political leadership and system-wide commitment are now required to move from engagement to implementation, honour partnership commitments and invest fairly in the VCSE and social care workforce that underpins neighbourhood delivery.

