

UPDATE

from the Regional
Mental Health Service (RMHS)

Issue 3
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Health and
Social Care



Department of
Health

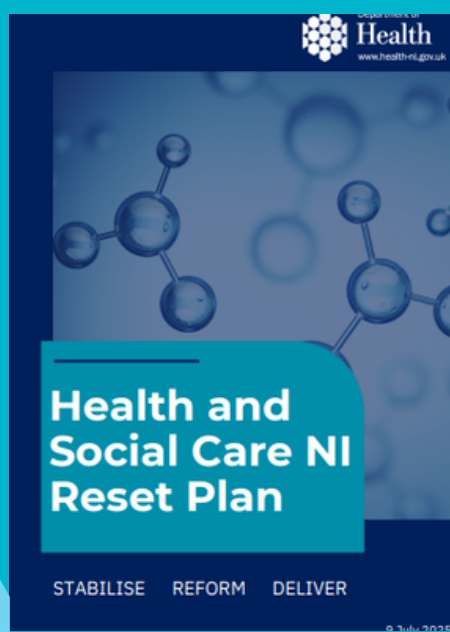
An Roinn Sláinte
Máinnystrie O Poustie

Foundations to Collaboration: Regional Mental Health Service (RHMS)

Published in July 2025, the Department of Health's three-year Health and Social Care Reset Plan outlined a series of proposals to further advance the establishment of a Regional Mental Health Service (RMHS). Key commitments include the development of a regionally consistent community mental health model and the continued expansion of Local and Area Collaboratives.

The RMHS Collaborative Board led a comprehensive co-design process to develop and agree a refreshed three-year Implementation Plan for delivering the RMHS and its associated enabling structures and key priorities.

Implementation activity will begin following the plan's final approval at the July 2026 RMHS Collaborative Board meeting.



Connecting: Building Relationships and Raising Awareness



**John Morgan, RMHS Service User Consultant with presenters
at the Approved Social Work Conference**

The RMHS Team have been actively engaging with stakeholders across secondary care, primary care, and the community and voluntary sectors. The team has represented the RMHS, along with the voices of service users and carers at a range of events and forums. Through this work, they have raised awareness of the RMHS's priorities and have supported stakeholders' involvement in developing the refreshed three-year RMHS Implementation Plan.

[Further Information Here](#)

Connecting enabling structures

Health and Social Care Level: Area Mental Health Collaboratives

The South Eastern Trust held online engagement events and a face to face workshop in April 2026 to initiate the development of the South Eastern Area Mental Health Collaborative. Their second workshop will take place in June 2026 to agree terms of reference. The RMHS Team has also met with representatives from the Northern, Belfast, and Western Trusts, to support the establishment of the remaining Area Collaboratives. The Northern Trust will be holding online engagement events and a face to face workshop in June 2026. Below is a direct update from the Southern Area Mental Health Collaborative (SAMHC).

The Southern Area Mental Health Collaborative (SAMHC), established in February 2025, is jointly chaired by the Southern Trust Mental Health Director and a representative from the Community and Voluntary Sector. This joint leadership approach key mechanism for translating the regional direction into area-wide and local planning, implementation and integration of mental health services to meet the assessed needs of people and communities. Membership of the Collaborative currently includes individuals with lived experience, representatives from the Community and Voluntary Sector, the Independent Sector, Primary Care, and Community Pharmacy.



Southern Area
Mental Health Collaborative

Our key priorities for 2025–2027 include: streamlining referral processes across all sectors; strengthening prevention and early intervention; reducing waiting times for secondary care mental health services; addressing mental health inequalities and targeting areas of greatest need; enhancing the overall service user experience; securing and optimising available resources; and developing more effective partnerships to provide more comprehensive support for individuals and their families.

During our first year, we captured and shared our learning in the Blueprint Pathfinder document, which will inform the rollout of Area Collaboratives across other Trust areas. Across the area we have established strong communication channels and are engaging with key partners to increase awareness of our purpose and activities.



LEARN MORE

or to request a **Summary Overview document**

Please email Amanda.Jones@southerntrust.hscni.net



Regional Level: Mental Health Service Collaborative Board

In May 2026, the RMHS Collaborative Board expressed their gratitude to Gavin Quinn for his leadership as he stepped down as Chair, and welcomed Dr Ciara McKillop as his successor.



Community Level: Local Mental Health Collaboratives

The RMHS is leading the development of a Local Mental Health Collaborative within the West Belfast area, bringing together partners from Primary Care, Secondary Care, and the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Over the past 12 months, a dedicated operational working group has undertaken significant effort to analyse mental health data from both primary and secondary care, as well as reviewing broader population-level insights provided by Public Health Agency colleagues.

The operational working group is now finalising the Terms of Reference and membership principles for the Collaborative, with a particular focus on ensuring equitable and meaningful representation from community and voluntary organisations as well as ensuring alignment with the new Neighbourhood Model of care. It is anticipated that the Local Mental Health Collaborative will be formally established and fully operational over the summer.



Members of the West Belfast Operational Working Group

Improving Regional Consistency and Standardisation in Mental Health Provision

Community Mental Health Model

Work is progressing on the development of a Regionally Consistent Community Mental Health Model designed to ensure that people receive the same high standard of care regardless of where they live. All Trusts have contributed to a comprehensive regional review of current Community Mental Health Services and Teams, and the RMHS Team has mapped how services currently operate while sharing valuable insights into the patient journey. A regional working group is now using this information to design a shared model aimed at improving consistency and reducing unnecessary variation.



One of the key findings from the review is that people generally feel they are treated with dignity, respect, and confidentiality. However, differences in terminology, processes, and pathways across Trusts can lead to confusion and inconsistent experiences. Early indications suggest that Encompass, the new digital health and care record, will support greater alignment by enabling more standardised ways of working.

Looking ahead, priorities include delivering high-quality, evidence-based care shaped by service-user experience; ensuring fair access and consistent pathways across all Trusts; supporting staff wellbeing and building a confident, skilled workforce; and improving integration across services, with particular attention to the emerging Neighbourhood Model of Care.

New Regional Guidance Puts Lived Experience at the Heart of Mental Health Reform



Northern Ireland's mental health system has taken a major step toward genuine co-production with the publication of new Regional Mental Health Service (RMHS) guidance on involving people with lived and living experience. Developed collaboratively by the Mental Health Engagement Platform, service users, carers, service user consultants, Health and Social Care (HSC) leaders the guidance aims to ensure that those who know the system best are shaping how it evolves.

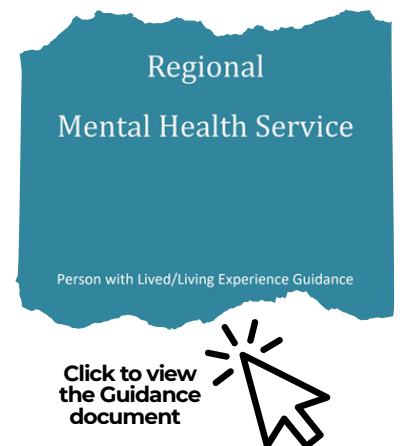
Rooted in the Mental Health Strategy 2021–2031, the document outlines a clear expectation: lived experience is not an optional extra, but an essential source of expertise that must influence planning, delivery and evaluation across all mental health services. The guidance positions people with lived experience as “experts by experience,” emphasising their role in shaping more responsive, person centred and psychologically informed services.

A detailed recruitment framework promotes transparency, inclusivity and open selection methods, while also ensuring compliance with GDPR, safeguarding and confidentiality requirements. The guidance further outlines a comprehensive support structure, recognising that meaningful participation requires practical, emotional and psychological supports—from accessible venues and reimbursed expenses to wellbeing protocols, trained staff and crisis procedures.

The guidance sets out a series of principles—valuing people, collective leadership, inclusivity, transparency and cross boundary collaboration—that seek to transform how engagement happens. It pushes organisations beyond one off consultation and towards long term, structured partnership working backed by training, wellbeing support and clear communication.

Acknowledging potential risks—such as misunderstanding roles, tokenistic recruitment, conflicts of interest or contributors feeling unwell—the document offers pragmatic ways to safeguard wellbeing while maintaining authentic involvement.

Finally, the guidance introduces a monitoring and evaluation approach to ensure accountability, learning and continuous improvement.



In essence, this new framework signals a cultural shift: lived and living experience is no longer peripheral. It is central to shaping a mental health system that works—because it is co designed with those who use it.

Regional Service User Consultant ; A Journey with those with lived and living experience

A Journey with those with lived and living experience

Momentum continues to build as lived experience becomes firmly integrated into policy development, professional education and service redesign.

A key highlight includes strengthened political engagement following a meeting at Stormont with Orlaithí Flynn MLA, Member of the Committee for Health. Also, I and other service users and carers reinforced the importance of advocacy, resulting in service user priorities being reflected in the Mental Health Code and wider reform work.



Strategic involvement has also deepened through ongoing participation in Right Care, Right Person, ensuring that redesign efforts reflect the realities of those using services.

The Experience to Empowerment Workshops, led by service users and carers for service users and carers, attracted over 140 participants. Contributions to the Approved Social Worker Conference and membership of the ASW Group at Queen's University Belfast highlight the growing demand for lived-experience-led learning within professional training.

Looking ahead, priorities include a regional framework for peer support workers and ongoing expansion of lived experience roles—ensuring that service user voice remains central to shaping future mental health services

Thanks to the Lived Experience Platform that is facilitated by the PCC for guiding and coproducing. They are a group of people who are primarily carers and service users and whom amplify our voice. Indeed, thanks to all the service users and carers who have trusted me to coproduce with them and bring their issues forward.

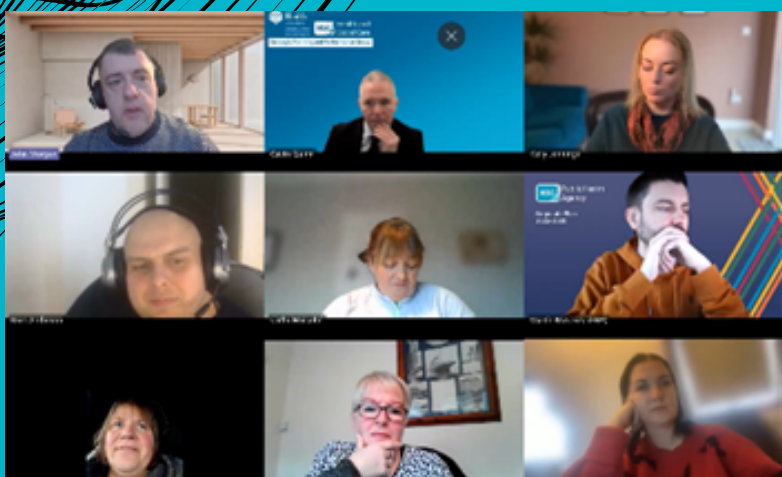


Photo from the 'Experience to Empowerment' online workshop.

Service User Perspective: Voices That Shape the Future

Patient and Client Council Mental Health Engagement Platform

Voice of a Carer - Moira



Having often faced physical and emotional burnout and a great sense of isolation, fear and anxiety over the past 21 years, as a parent and formal and informal carer, I believe it is really important that carers have the opportunity to engage fully in discussions with Health and Social Care professionals. I believe carers deserve to have the right support to try to help develop and improve services and support throughout Northern Ireland.

The varied opportunities that the PCC Engagement Platform offers to members of the public is very much welcomed and valued.

As a Carer, I have been navigating complex systems here in Northern Ireland and previously while living in England, to try to advocate for my daughter. I have tried to ensure that she has and will continue to have the right support for her complex range of health needs and special needs on top of dealing daily with my daughter's ongoing mental health struggles and complex PTSD.

I currently share my lived experiences and represent the carer voice as part of the Client Engagement group at Mindwise and have the peer support as a Carer with Mindwise North Coast Carers Alliance group. I now feel stronger empowered and encouraged to speak up and more recently have been able to add my voice and give my views and opinions as a member of the PCC Engagement Platform group.

I'm really hoping by using my voice as a carer and sharing some of our family's lived experiences that this will help shape, influence and lead to greater co-creation, collaborative working and co-production going forward. My hope is to ensure much better outcomes overall for those who need and value appropriate support when it is provided.

If I can continue to add my carer's voice and our family's lived experiences to help improve systems, processes, resources and overall provision then I'm ready and willing to do so. No one needs to battle alone and change can happen.

RMHS Refresh Plan

The Plan

A key element of this work involves ensuring the RMHS is aligned to and supporting delivery of the new neighbourhood model and recommendations arising from the review on the Deliverability of the Mental Health Strategy.

The co-produced Refreshed Implementation Plan has been drafted and presented to the RMHS Collaborative Board in March 2026. Five overarching priorities have been agreed for 2026–2029:

- Driving regional consistency and reducing unwarranted variation (Networks and CMH Model)
- Establishing five Area Mental Health Collaboratives
- Developing Local Mental Health Collaboratives
- Improving outcomes and experiences through meaningful service user and carer involvement
- Data and Outcomes

Under each of these of these priorities are a number of Workstreams and Actions which will focus on service user outcomes and impact. The draft Refreshed Implementation Plan has been disseminated out to stakeholders by RMHS Collaborative Board members and feedback is in the process of being gathered. The RMHS Team will present a final draft to the next Collaborative Board meeting for approval.

Support

We encourage all stakeholders, HSC staff, service providers, community partners and individuals to sign up [here](#) for future newsletters and updates. This will ensure you are kept informed as implementation progresses, milestones are reached and opportunities for engagement arise.

If you or someone you know has been affected by any of the issues referenced in this newsletter, support is available. Please do not hesitate to reach out to those around you or contact one of the services listed below:

Lifeline: 24/7 Crisis Support Service

People living in Northern Ireland can call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000. Deaf and hard of hearing Textphone users can call on 18001 0808 808 8000. Calls to Lifeline are free.

www.lifelinehelpline.info

Minding Your Head

Information, advice and support to help people in Northern Ireland look after and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

www.mindingyourhead.info

Family Support NI

Information on a wide range of family support services in Northern Ireland.

www.familysupportni.gov.uk

Helplines NI

Vital support services including information, advice, counselling, a listening ear and be-friending for those with health and wellbeing needs.

<https://helplinesni.com/>

CYPSP Youth Wellness Web

Resources to help young people get the support they need, plus local services that can help.

<https://cypsp.hscni.net/youth-wellness-web/>

Find out more about RMHS



RMHService@hscni.net



<https://online.hscni.net>

www.health-ni.gov.uk

Produced by the Regional Mental Health Service Team,
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