Summary: Health and social care integration Northern Ireland

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4 March 2016

This high-level summary sets out the important publications and milestones in the development of health and social care integration in Northern Ireland.

Integrated structure for health and social care
Northern Ireland has had an integrated structure for health and social care services since 1973. The introduction of integrated health and social care aimed to improve the provision of services.

This structure remained until 2009, when the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) reduced the number of bodies involved in the administration, commissioning and delivery of services. These changes aimed to maximise economies of scale and improve outcomes. This integrated structure remains today.

At the end of 2015 the Health Minister announced his vision for health and social care. This included suggestions for changing elements of the integrated structure. BMA Northern Ireland has responded to the consultation on the vision.

Reviews and announcements on health and social care integration
A number of recent reviews on health and social care in Northern Ireland have highlighted the importance of integrated care. The reviews have included recommendations on how to develop this further in Northern Ireland.

In 2005 Professor John Appleby’s review, Independent Review of Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland, recommended that the integration of health and social care be re-examined. He identified integration as an area where one part of the system could negatively impact on another. For example the lack of social service provision delaying a patient’s discharge from hospital. The report also highlighted a lack of integration between GPs and the rest of the primary care sector.

The McKinsey & Company review, Reshaping the System, implications for Northern Ireland’s Health and Social Care Services of the 2010 Spending Review, in 2010 also argued for greater integration between primary and community health and social care. The review concluded that changes would also reduce activity in hospitals.
In 2011 the **transforming your care, a review of health and social care in Northern Ireland** was published. This substantial review made recommendations for the future shape of services in Northern Ireland and provided an implementation plan. Integrated care was identified as one of the major principles of change. Following the review, ICPs (integrated care partnerships) were introduced. ICPs join together a range of health and social care services, as well as design and coordinate local services. The ICPs aim to improve the patients’ journey, manage chronic illness and prevent unnecessary hospital admissions. In 2013 the **Health Minister endorsed the establishment of ICPs across Northern Ireland**.

**Sir Liam Donaldson’s examination of governance arrangement in health and social care** in 2014 also considered integration. The report found that although health and social care integration was a distinguishing feature of the structure in Northern Ireland and had great advantages, it did fall short on promoting the highest standards of care. Following the report, the **health minister in 2015 set out his vision for health and social care**. This included suggestions for adjusting how the integrated structure works.

In 2014 the **making it better strategy** was refreshed. The strategy was to embed pharmacists in the community. The health minister in 2015 **announced a five year initiative of up to £2.6 million additional investment** to provide for pharmacists to work alongside GPs. This announcement supports the BMA Northern Ireland GP committee work in creating, developing and implementing **GP federations** across Northern Ireland. GP Federations aim to increase the capacity and scope of services available from a GP.

**Further reading:**


