



ACCESS TO HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE GUIDANCE

November 2015

Welcome to Northern Ireland

Arriving in a different country can be an overwhelming experience. We have put together some information which you might find useful. This booklet will inform you about health and social care services and how to access them. We want to ensure that you receive a service which meets your individual needs. Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland are generally free of charge at the point of delivery for people who are considered to be ordinarily resident. This will depend on your individual circumstances and therefore some people may have to pay for anything other than emergency Health and Social Care. We have provided details of the Health and Social Care Service in Northern Ireland and how to appropriately access it.

Alternative Formats

This document is available in a range of alternative formats and languages and can be made available on request e.g. Minority Ethnic languages, braille, easy-read, MP3. Please contact the Equality Lead in your Trust area if you need the document in a different language or format: (please see 1.3 for contact details).

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1. Introduction

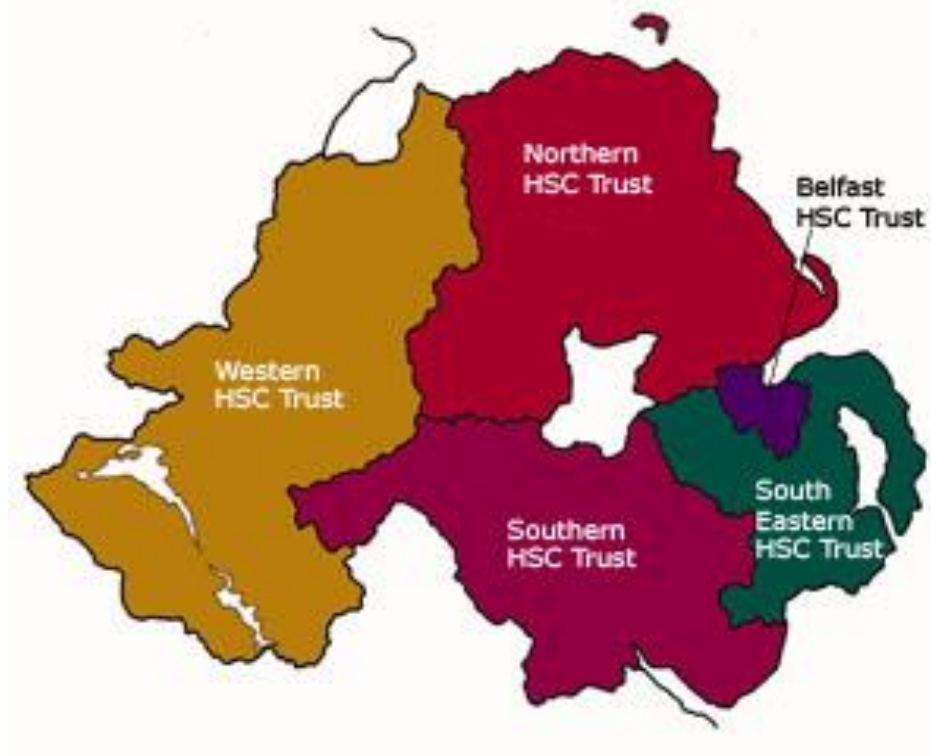
1.1 Health and Social Care (HSC)

In Northern Ireland the National Health Service (NHS) is referred to as Health and Social Care or HSC. HSC in Northern Ireland provides Acute Services in critical and emergency care and also provides social care services like home care services, family and children's services, day care services and social work services.

There are 6 Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland, providing health and social care services.

The map below shows five regions within Northern Ireland. These regions are called Health and Social Care Trust areas. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust covers all five regions of Northern Ireland.

1.2 HSC Trust Areas



1.3 Health & Social Care Trust Equality Leads:

Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	Orla Barron Health & Social Inequalities Manager 1 st Floor McKinney House Musgrave Park Hospital BELFAST BT9 7JB	Telephone: 028 95046567 Textphone: 028 90637406 orla.barron@belfasttrust.hscni.net
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	Lynda Gordon Head of Equality Unit 1 st Floor Hill Building St Luke's Hospital Loughgall Rd ARMAGH BT61 7NQ	Telephone: 028 3741 2643 Textphone: 028 3741 2446 lynda.gordon@southerntrust.hscni.net
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	Susan Thompson Equality Manager 2 nd Floor Lough House Ards Hospital NEWTOWNARDS BT23 4AS Suzanne McCartney Equality Manager Lagan Valley Hospital LISBURN BT28 1JP	Telephone: 028 9151 2177 Textphone: 028 9151 0137 susan.thompson@setrust.hscni.net Telephone: 028 9266 5141 Ext 87604 Textphone: 028 9263 3522 suzanne.mccartney@setrust.hscni.net
Western Health & Social Care Trust	Maura O'Neill Equality Manager Siobhan O'Donnell Equality Manager	Telephone: 028 82835278 Textphone: 028 82835345 maura.oneill@westerntrust.hscni.net Telephone: 028 82835278 Textphone: 028 82835345 siobhan.odonnell@westerntrust.hscni.net

Northern Health & Social Care Trust	Alison Irwin Head of Equality Route Complex 8e Coleraine Road Ballymoney Co Antrim BT53 6BP	Telephone: 028 2766 1377 Mobile/Textphone: 07825667154 Fax: 028 27661209 alison.irwin@northerntrust.hscni.net equality.unit@northerntrust.hscni.net
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust	Michelle Lemon Assistant Director of HR, Equality, PPI & Patient Experience Ambulance Headquarters Site 30, Knockbracken Healthcare Park Saintfield Road BELFAST BT8 8SG	Telephone: 028 90400999 Textphone: 028 9040 0871 Fax: 028 9040 0903 Email: Michelle.Lemon@nias.hscni.net

1.4 Interpreters

Health and Social Care Service Providers recognise that they must ensure that you are able to understand and be understood when accessing health and social care.



The Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS) strives to make accessing health and social care services easier for patients who do not speak English as a first or competent second language. The service provides face to face interpreters (which means that an interpreter will be physically present during your

appointment). The service is free-of-charge and legally, it is your right to have professional language assistance.

- NIHSCIS is a 24 hours, 7 days per week service.
- Interpreters are professionally trained and accredited with a Community Interpreting qualification.
- Interpreters are required to wear their NIHSCIS identity badge at all times.
- Interpreters are bound by confidentiality.
- Interpreters will only contact the patient/client prior to the appointment when asked to do so by the HSC practitioner in order to confirm attendance.
- Interpreters should always obtain consent for interpreting as part of their introduction
- The operational team who deal with requests will, if asked, try to provide the same interpreter for continuity purposes.

What your Interpreter can do

- Be bilingual and know how to interpret, facilitating communication.
- Interpret accurately (not always word by word interpreting, but the full meaning of the conversation being conveyed).
- Be impartial and maintain confidentiality.
- Clarify cultural nuances and be aware of other cultural or circumstantial issues.
- Signpost clients or patients to other services when possible.

What your Interpreter cannot do

- Written translation of a long document.
- Client's advice work (bilingual advocacy).
- Speak instead of you – they will only interpret your words.
- Look after children.
- Provide counselling or transport.
- Give out your telephone number or contact details.

To request an Interpreter

You need to let the booking office or the receptionist know if you need language support. It is best to let them know in advance so that they can try to access an interpreter in your preferred language. The staff or receptionist will book an interpreter on your behalf.

Telephone Interpreting



At times it may be more appropriate to provide a telephone interpreter or indeed if a face to face interpreter is not available, Health and Social Care practitioners can use telephone interpreting via the Big Word. Big Word provides interpreters via telephone link to Health and Social Care appointments in Northern Ireland. These interpreters are professional, qualified interpreters who are bound by a similar code of conduct as those who work for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service.

1.5 Eligibility for Healthcare Treatment

Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland are generally free at the point of delivery for people who are considered to be ordinarily resident, which means that you do not have to pay to see a doctor nor do you need your own health insurance. Depending on your circumstances, you may have to pay for some health services like dental treatment and eye care.

In principle, whether or not you have to pay for your treatment depends on the type of treatment and on whether you are living in Northern Ireland or just visiting. If the treatment is emergency and is provided in an emergency department, walk in clinic or minor injuries unit, it is provided for free of charge. Once emergency treatment has been provided, after-care in the forms of admission to hospital as in inpatient, or as an outpatient etc may be chargeable if you are not “ordinarily” resident in Northern Ireland or are not deemed to fulfil one of the exemption criteria.

1.6 How Do You Access HSC? Your Medical Card

To get access to services you should register with a General Practitioner (GP) Practice.

The family doctor, also known as the General Practitioner or GP, is the entry point for a whole range of services. Some GPs work individually, others work together with other GPs in a GP Practice or Health and Care Centre.

You should register with a GP Practice straight away when you arrive in Northern Ireland rather than wait until you need to access health or social care services. To become registered, you will need to fill in an application form. It is called the HS22X form. It is available in many other languages, click on the link to access the form - <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/1814.htm>

The HS22X form and the translated versions are also available from any GP Practice or from the Business Services Organisation (BSO), which look after your registration. Their contact details are:

Business Services Organisation
Headquarters
2 Franklin Street
Belfast BT2 8DQ
Phone: (028) 9032 4431
Textphone: (028) 9053 5575
Complaints: Complaints.bso@hscr
Website: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net>

You should get an application form, fill it in and then take it along with any proof of identification and eligibility requested to your chosen GP Practice. If they agree to take you on as a patient, they will take your application form and check your paperwork. You will then receive a medical card issued by the BSO. This may take up to eight weeks. You do not have to pay for your medical card. Your medical card is an important document; it entitles you to receive a range of services.

2. What are the options in terms of looking after your Health?

Remember to Choose Well!



2.1 Self-care

Self-care is the best choice to treat minor illnesses, ailments and injuries. A range of common illnesses and complaints, such as aches and pains, coughs, colds, upset stomachs and sore throats can be treated with over the counter medicines and plenty of rest. Remember, whether treated or not, most of these will get better. Some self-care essentials - the following are available to buy over the counter: Paracetamol, Aspirin, Ibuprofen, rehydration mixtures, indigestion remedies, plasters and thermometer. (Always follow the instructions on the pack.)

If you are still feeling unwell you should contact your Local Doctor or General Practitioner (GP).

2.2 About your General Practitioner (GP) or Family Doctor

Local or Family doctors, also known as General Practitioners (GPs), look after the health of people in their local community and deal with a whole range of health problems. There are over 350 GP Practices throughout Northern Ireland.

2.3 GP services

GPs provide a range of services including:

- Medical advice on a range of issues
- Physical examinations
- Diagnosis of symptoms
- Prescribing of medication
- Health education and health screening
- Giving vaccinations
- Carrying out simple surgical operations.
- Providing ongoing care for more longstanding or chronic conditions
- Some GP Practices provide an online Appointments Booking or Repeat Prescription service (via their Practice websites).

The GP is responsible for helping you to look after your health needs. They will decide whether you should see any other health specialist and, if so, will make all necessary arrangements. Your GP will also decide what medicines you need and can give you a prescription.

You are entitled to treatment from one of the GPs at the practice where you are registered. You have no automatic right to see a particular GP. When you register with a GP practice, you may be seen by any GP within the practice and may not always see the same practitioner, however you will have continuity of care from within that practice. You must make an appointment to see a GP, by contacting the Practice - by telephone, or by calling in to the Practice. (Some GP's have drop in surgeries).

2.4 How to find a GP Practice

There are over 350 GP Practices in Northern Ireland. Search for a GP Practice in your area <http://servicefinder.hscni.net>.

It is important that you are aware of your basic rights:

- You have the right to ask to be treated by a doctor of your own gender
- You should note that you have the right to change your GP practice at any time.

2.5 Request a Call Back

Some GP Practices provide the facility to request a call back and they will arrange a telephone call back slot, when it is most convenient for you.

2.6 Home Visits

If you feel too unwell to attend the practice, you may be entitled to a home visit by a GP. You should contact your GP Practice to request this. You cannot, however, insist that a GP visits you at home. A GP will only visit you at home if they think your medical condition requires it.

2.7 Medication/Prescription

If a GP decides you need medication, they will give you a prescription, which you should then take to any pharmacy / chemist to collect the medication. See Section on 'Pharmacy Services'.

3. Out of Hours Services

GP Practices are usually open Monday to Friday, at times advertised in the Practice. For nights, weekends and public holidays services are provided by Out of Hours services. Practices will have information about how to contact Out of Hours services if you need a doctor. There should be a recorded message on the Practice telephone as well as notices on the door which provide further details.

All Out of Hours Centres will provide urgent medical care for problems that cannot wait until your own GP practice opens again. They also provide services even if you are not registered with a local Practice. GP Out of Hours is available if you require urgent medical care when your GP surgery is closed. GP Out of Hours services operate from 6pm each weekday evening until your GP surgery opens the next morning and 24 hours on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. Remember to telephone the service first. The doctor or nurse will give you advice over the telephone, decide if you need to be seen by a doctor or will refer you to another service if required. Your GP surgery will have the contact details for your area.

Urgent GP Out of Hours care can be found by contacting your local GP Practice and also online at www.nidirect.gov.uk/choosewell

3.1 Minor Injuries Unit

A Minor Injuries Unit can treat injuries that are not critical or life threatening, such as:

- Injuries to upper and lower limbs
- Broken bones, sprains, bruises and wounds
- Bites – human, animal and insect
- Burns and scalds
- Abscesses and wound infections
- Minor head injuries
- Broken noses and nosebleeds
- Foreign bodies in the eyes and nose.

If you or a child over 5 years old suffers a minor injury you can go to one of the Minor Injuries Units. Children under 5 years must be brought to the Emergency Department in your area.

3.2 Hospitals

Your GP may refer you to a specialist doctor at a hospital or you may need to go to hospital if you require emergency treatment.

If your GP cannot deal with a problem then you'll usually be referred to a hospital for tests, treatment, or to see a consultant with specialist knowledge.

If your GP arranges for a referral this means they have arranged for you to see a Consultant or a Specialist regarding tests or treatment. You will receive a letter from the hospital or clinic with details of an appointment which has been made for you to see a Specialist Doctor. For most Specialists, there might be waiting times involved. If you are unable to attend you need to cancel your appointment. You will then be given a new date.

The Specialist will see you and discuss your health issue with you. If necessary, they will arrange for tests to be carried out. In this case, you will receive a further letter from your hospital with information regarding the date and time when you need to go back for your tests.

3.3 Northern Ireland New Entrants Service (NINES)

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board, has established a regional Nurse-led service for new entrants to Northern Ireland.

The project provides a variety of clinics to support the health and social well-being of new immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and targeted children 0-16 years.

This unique service aims to support all new entrants by offering screening, primary childhood immunisations, health education and sign posting to other services. A range of clinics can be accessed to address the health and social well-being needs of the client group to include drop-in clinics for advice and support, health assessment clinics, immunisation clinics and health promotion sessions.

Clients are offered a holistic health assessment; screening for communicable diseases such as TB, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C for clients from high risk countries and immunisations as required. Assistance/advice is given with registration for General Practitioner and dental services; signposting to other services and onward referral as appropriate.

Service Delivery:

- A client held passport has been developed in five languages to enhance communication between different services
- Clients bring their health passport to other health appointments.
- Delivery of mantoux/BCG¹ programme for children 0-16 years.
- Support in registering with General Practitioners/Dentist/Opticians.
- Health Screening particularly for Tuberculosis, Blood Pressure, Urinalysis, Blood Glucose.
- Blood screening tests.
- Direct referral pathways has been established to specialist service i.e. Genito-urinary medicine clinic, Maternity Services.
- Fast tracking for chest x-rays allows early detection of Tuberculosis and onward referral to chest clinic for investigations and treatment if required.
- Client advocacy.
- Confidential help and advice

For further information on the services available, clinic time or to make a referral the Northern Ireland New Entrant Service can be contacted: Monday to Friday at Telephone Number (028) 9056 5909.

3.4 Emergency Services

In a serious accident or emergency, you should go to your local Emergency Department (ED).



You can telephone 999 or 112 for Emergency Services - Before calling you should ensure that your condition, or that of the person you are phoning on behalf of, could not be better treated by self-care, pharmacy advice, GP advice or self-referral to the Emergency Department.

¹ BCG is a vaccination used to help prevent Tuberculosis. BCG stands for "Bacille Calmette-Guerin" and is named after Dr Calmette and Dr Guerin who developed the vaccine

Emergency ambulances should be kept for real emergencies where lives are at risk. If you genuinely need ambulance assistance, you should call 999 or 112 and when asked by the operator which service you require you should answer “ambulance”.

3.5 Who will speak to you?

You will then be connected to ambulance control who will ask you questions regarding your:

- Telephone number
- Location of incident
- Nature of incident.

An ambulance will be sent to you as soon as possible, if appropriate.

3.6 What if English is not your first language?

If English is not your first language, the Ambulance Service can quickly bring a qualified interpreter into the call to enable communication.

Telephone interpreters are:

- Available 24 hours, 7 days per week, 365 days per year
- Professionally trained and qualified
- Provided under contract by The Big Word.

The interpreter will:

- Be bilingual and know how to interpret, facilitating communication
- Interpret accurately
- Be impartial and maintain confidentiality
- Not speak instead of you – they will only interpret your words.

3.7 How are you prioritised?

The person on the phone will ask you more questions to determine the seriousness of your situation and the urgency of response required.

Calls in Ambulance Control are prioritised based on clinical need with the most immediate response sent to those whose clinical need is greatest.

3.8 What can you do while waiting for the ambulance?

Depending on the situation, the call-taker may stay on the line with you to give you practical advice while you wait for the ambulance to arrive. This advice may include actions to take to:

- Position the patient
- Clear the patient's airway
- Stem blood loss
- Perform CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation).

3.9 What if an ambulance is not the best option for you?

It may become evident from the information provided that an emergency ambulance is not actually required immediately to deal with your situation. In such circumstances, Ambulance Control may pass you through to a clinician in the Control Centre who will give you advice relating to the treatment of your condition.

On occasions, Ambulance Control may signpost you to a more appropriate service within Health and Social Care to deal with your need as an alternative to attending the Emergency Department.

3.10 Who will be sent to you?

In life threatening emergencies, people in N.I. tend to expect an ambulance crew of two people to arrive. However NIAS makes effective use of Rapid Response Paramedics who will arrive in a car. These vehicles are equipped with the vital life-saving equipment that may be needed in an emergency. The car can get to the scene more quickly and allow the Paramedic to deliver treatment in a more timely manner. An ambulance will also be sent to provide further support to the Paramedic and to transport the patient to the Emergency Department.

You will be asked details regarding your name, your location and the nature of the medical problem. An ambulance will be sent to you as soon as possible. There is no charge for this service.

The ambulance will take you to the Emergency Department (ED) at the hospital where a doctor will examine you. Again, this treatment is free of charge.

The following is a list of hospital services:

- Emergency Departments - providing 24 hour emergency treatment
- In-patient Services - perform operations or provide treatment, patients stay in hospital for one night or more.
- Day Services - perform small operations and investigations and discharge patients home on the same day.
- Out-patients Services - appointments with specialist doctors in a range of clinical specialties.

3.11 What happens after the arrival of the Paramedic?

After assessing, and possibly providing treatment to, the patient, the Paramedic may decide that:

- Further treatment is required at the Emergency Department and that ambulance transport is required
- Further treatment is required at the Emergency Department but that ambulance transport is not required
- No further treatment is required and the patient may remain at home
- The patient may be referred to another healthcare professional within Health and Social Care e.g. GP or District Nurse
- The patient may be referred to a specialist and more appropriate treatment centre within Health and Social Care.

REMEMBER – KEEP AMBULANCES FOR REAL EMERGENCIES

3.12 Maternity Services

If you are planning to have a baby or think you might be pregnant, you should contact your GP as soon as possible. Your GP can confirm your pregnancy, offer health advice, and can help you decide where and how you wish to give birth.

Midwives have specialist training to care for you and your newborn baby. They work in both hospitals and the community. They will care for you and help you prepare for the birth when you are pregnant, at the birth of your baby and up to 28 days after the birth. The community midwife will call to see you and your new baby after birth to make sure that all is well. The midwife will see you in your own home after you come home from hospital. You do not need to make any arrangements yourself - the hospital will do this for you.

3.13 Health Visitors

Health Visitors are specialist community public health nurses trained to support families and children in all aspects of health and well-being.

They will visit you at home just before and 10 to 14 days after your baby is born. The level of visiting after this will be determined on the outcome of a family health assessment. The Health Visitor will check your baby's health and development up until they are ready for school. They will also provide support and help to families on all aspects of health e.g. post-natal depression, sleeping, feeding, immunisations and behaviour management. If your child has a health problem the Health Visitor will refer the child for further tests and treatment.

3.14 Family Planning Services

Family Planning Services offer free advice on contraception and cervical screening as well as sexual health screening, advice and treatment.

These services are provided by local Family Planning Clinics and by some GPs.

You can get details of Family Planning Clinics from your GP Practice, Midwife or Health Visitor. Family Planning Services are free and totally confidential.

The Family Planning Association (FPA) provides a confidential local rate telephone service (0845 122 8687) from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, offering information and advice on a range of sexual health issues.

3.15 Other Sexual Health Services

Clinics that specialise in sexually transmitted infections are called genitourinary medicine (GUM) and sexual health clinics. You can get the number of a clinic in your area from the phone book under GUM (genitourinary medicine), Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD), special clinic or sexual health clinic. You can refer yourself to these clinics, which are also:

- Free and confidential - they will not contact anyone, not even your GP without your permission and are open to everyone (regardless of age, sexual orientation etc.)

To find your local GUM or Sexual Health Clinic please click on the link: <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/health-and-well-being/health-services/doctors-dentists-and-other-health-services/genitourinary-medicine-gum-clinics.htm>

3.16 Social Workers

Social Workers give advice and support to people with a variety of social needs. This would include relationships, alcohol or domestic problems, disability, general health and mental health issues and child protection.

The service covers all ages from children to older people. Social Workers who work in Adult services assess the needs of older people, people with a physical or a learning disability, or mental health needs. They will work with individuals to support them to achieve their lifestyle choices and with their family and community to achieve their desired outcome. The Social Worker may assist with accessing services or resources as part of the outcome of assessed need, such as care and support at home, day care, respite breaks or residential or nursing home

care. Social workers assist people to find ways forward after a traumatic event in their lives and support them to determine their own solutions.

3.17 Child and Adult Protection Services

There are circumstances where Social Workers may have to intervene to protect children or adults from harm or abuse. Social services in Northern Ireland have a legal duty to protect those who are at risk of or who have experienced abuse or ill-treatment within our society.

If you have any concerns about the safety or well-being of a child, or you think they may be at risk of harm, please contact the child care Gateway Team using the numbers below:

Belfast Trust:	028 9050 7000
Northern Trust:	0300 1234333
Western Trust:	028 7131 4090
South Eastern Trust:	0300 1000300
Southern Trust:	0800 7837745

If you have any concerns about the safety or well-being of an adult, or you think they may be at risk of harm, please contact the Adult Protection service using the numbers below:

Belfast Trust:	028 95041744
Northern Trust:	028 94413125
Western Trust:	028 71611366/ 028 82835960
South Eastern Trust:	028 92501227
Southern Trust:	028 3083 2650

Outside of office hours an Emergency Social Work Service for adults or children can be contacted using: 028 9504 9999

In an emergency the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) can also be contacted using: 999.

3.18 Mental Health Services

If you have a mental health problem you should see your GP first. They will assess the problem and may either provide medication and monitor your condition or may refer you to a specialist, for example psychiatrist,

psychologist or counsellor, if necessary. Your GP may be able to recommend a support group for the particular issue. Where others are involved in your care, such as a psychiatrist, social worker or family members, your GP may liaise with them in order to provide you with the best overall treatment, care and support.

3.19 Services for People with a Disability

Throughout Northern Ireland, a range of health and social care services are provided to meet the needs of people with a disability (including learning, mental, physical, and sensory disabilities), and their family or carers. This includes assessments, counselling, help with daily living and the provision of specialist equipment, as well as rehabilitation, advocacy and respite care services.

Your GP will be able to provide you with further information on the services that are available.

3.20 Allied Health Professionals

Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) is the collective title given to 7 professional groups:

- Nutrition and Dietetics
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Orthoptics
- Ophthalmology (Eye Care).

AHPs work with people of all ages in a range of surroundings including hospitals, people's homes, clinics, surgeries and schools. Their particular skills and expertise help people to:

- Recover movement or mobility
- Improve nutritional status
- Develop communication skills
- Restore confidence in everyday living skills.

3.21 School Nurse

School Nurses will provide a general health assessments in the school for all children in their first year in primary school and in first year in secondary school. You will normally be invited to attend these sessions with the nurse to discuss your child's health and development. This will include immunisations and vaccinations, screening of vision, hearing, height, and body mass index. If your child has a health need, the School Nurse will discuss this with parents or guardians and may refer the child for further tests and treatment.

3.22 Childhood Immunisation Programme

Immunisation is the best and safest way to stop your baby or child becoming sick from various infectious diseases for example measles. A baby usually has its first vaccination at 8 weeks old. This will be given at your GP surgery. It takes a number of injections to fully protect your child so it is important to complete the course.

If vaccinations have been missed your child can still catch up, even after a long gap. They do not have to start the course again. Some diseases can be serious in older children so it is also important that they receive their booster injections. In Northern Ireland, the diseases for which immunisation is offered include: Polio, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Whooping Cough (Pertussis), Hib, Meningococcal Group C, Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (German measles). You do not need to pay for these immunisations.

Information on Tuberculosis otherwise known as (TB) and BCG infectious diseases can be found in various languages on the Public Health Agency website. <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>

The information leaflets provide detail on symptoms, preventions and treatments.

Your GP, Health Visitor, School Nurse or a Nurse at your GP Practice will be able to help with any questions about immunisations.

3.23 Pharmacy Services (The Chemist)

Pharmacists (sometimes called Chemists) are experts in medicines and how they work. Your GP is the person who decides what medicines you need. They will give you a form called a prescription giving you permission to collect the medicine in a pharmacy. Without it your pharmacist cannot give you medicines, except for some very simple medicines such as painkillers, which you can also get in supermarkets and other stores. Medicines dispensed with a prescription are currently free within Northern Ireland.

Pharmacists also provide a range of services related to specific health issues - such as emergency contraception, pregnancy testing, needle exchange, oxygen or incontinence supplies - and can offer advice on healthy living and minor ailments - such as bugs and viruses, allergies, women's health or aches and pains.

Details of pharmacy rotas in your local area are published online at <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/pharmacyrota.htm>.

3.24 Dentists

If you are looking for dental treatment you have to register with a Dentist first. To register with a Dentist you must have a Medical Card. If you are a visitor you will also be able to access some treatments. You should check that the Dentist you contact will treat you as a health service patient (HSC). You may or may not have to pay for some dental services, depending on your circumstances, such as if you are aged under 16, you are aged under 19 and are in full-time education and if you are pregnant.

Find a Dentist in Northern Ireland

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2070.htm>

3.25 Opticians

If you need to have your eyes tested, contact a registered Optician. You may or may not have to pay for some ophthalmic services, depending on your circumstances, such as if you aged under 16, you are aged under 19 and are in full-time education or if you have certain

conditions. If you are entitled to the treatment, you will also need your medical card to access free HSC treatment

4. What if you are unhappy with the Service you receive?

4.1 Complaints Procedure

Making a complaint does not affect your rights and will not result in the loss of any service you have been assessed as needing.

4.2 How to Complain

You can make your complaint in the way, format or language that best suits you. This can be face to face, on the telephone, in a letter or by email. You should try to provide the Complaints Department with details of:

- How to contact you
- Who or what you are complaining about
- Where and when the event that caused your complaint happened
- Where possible, what action you would like taken.

Ideally you should try to complain as soon as possible, usually within six months of you becoming aware that you have a cause for complaint and normally no longer than 12 months after the event.

4.3 How to make a Complaint about a GP

If you want an apology, an explanation or a review of your treatment, you should first contact the place where you received care. The Hospital, GP Practice, Private Hospital or Clinic where you received care has its own complaints procedures. Please contact them for details.

You can find details of the Northern Ireland health service complaints procedures on the NI Direct website at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/make-a-complaint-against-the-health-service>

You can also contact the Patient and Client Council by email complaints.pcc@hscni.net or freephone 0800 917 0222.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust:

Complaints Department for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust:
Musgrave Park Hospital
Belfast BT9 7JB
Tel: (028) 9504 8000
Email: complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Northern Health and Social Care Trust:

Service User Feedback Department,
Bush House,
45 Bush Road, Antrim,
BT41 2Q3
Telephone (028) 9442 4655.

Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net

You can also complete and submit the Service User Feedback Form

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust:

To contact the Complaints Manager you can: Call in person, telephone, write, fax or email to Complaints Department;
Head of Complaints & Patient Liaison Service
Risk Management & Governance
Lough House
Ards Community Hospital
Newtownards
BT23 4AN
Telephone: (028) 9056 1427
Text phone: (028) 9151 0137
Fax: (028) 9056 4815
Email: complaints@setrust.hscni.net

Southern Health and Social Care Trust:

Corporate Complaints Officer
Craigavon Area Hospital
Portadown BT63 5QQ
Tel: 028 3861 4150
Email: complaints@southerntrust.hscni.net

Western Health and Social Care Trust:

Complaints Manager at: Complaints Department
Altnagelvin Area Hospital
Londonderry
BT47 6SB
Tel: 028 7134 5171 - extension: 214142
Or Direct Dial No. 028 7161 1226
SMS Text Facility: 07780949796
Email: complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)

Complaints and Admin Manager
Site 30
Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road
Belfast
BT8 8SG
Tel. 028 90400999
Textphone; 02890400871
complaints@nias.hscni.net
www.niamb.co.uk

5. What Will Happen Next?

Your complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. They will aim to respond to your complaint in full within 20 working days. Some complaints take longer to resolve than others. They will tell you if it becomes clear that they are unable to respond within these timescales, and they will explain why.

6. What happens if you are still not happy after the Trust has investigated your complaint?

If you remain unhappy, you can refer your complaint to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints (the Ombudsman). The Ombudsman will consider your complaint to determine whether it warrants investigation by him.

Further information on the services provided by the Ombudsman is available by contacting:

The Ombudsman
Freepost BEL 1478
Belfast
BT1 6BR
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: <mailto:ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk>
www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk

7. Where else can you get key Advice and Information?

Further advice and information can be obtained from:

- The Health and Social Care Board <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net>
- Your local Health and Social Care Trusts:
<http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net>
<http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net>
<http://www.setrust.hscni.net>
<http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net>
<http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net>
- The Public Health Agency <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>
- Patient Client Council <http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net>
- Business Services Organisation <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net>

7.1 Helplines Network NI: www.helplinesnetworkni.com

The website www.helplinesnetworkni.com offers a single point of access to Northern Ireland helpline numbers and websites, where people can find the right helpline to suit their needs. The easy to navigate website lists the details of over 20 Northern Ireland helplines run by public, voluntary and community organisations, all non-profit making. The website offers a search facility which allows users to search for the right support by entering a key word, find out information about what the helpline offers and get up to date contact details and operating times. The Network members provide a variety of vital support services including information, advice, counselling, a listening ear and befriending, covering a wide range of needs and issues.

- Your local Elected Representatives
<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/elections-in-northern-ireland>
- Your local Citizens Advice Bureaux
<http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk>
- Law Centre NI <http://www.lawcentreni.org>
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission <http://www.nihrc.org>
- Family Support <http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk>
- South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)
<http://www.stepni.org>
- The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
<http://www.nicem.org.uk>
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
<http://www.nicva.org>

If you would like any further information about HSC in Northern Ireland please click on the link provided:

[Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland Gateway](#)