



Healthcare Reform

The SDLP wants to create a modern, financially sustainable Health and Social Care system that delivers universal, high quality and safe services that are free at the point of delivery.

The Transforming Your Care reforms were to deliver a strategically planned, sustainable and financially viable model of healthcare for Northern Ireland. While the SDLP supports the intentions behind Transforming Your Care, the implementation of its recommendations have been hindered due to a lack of funding from successive Health Ministers.

Five years on we have a community healthcare infrastructure which is under-resourced and ill-equipped. The Department of Health has taken staff, resources, and beds away from the frontline and placed relatively little focus on community care.

The SDLP has engaged with the expert panel examining our health service. The SDLP will always be responsible when it comes to the issue of health and we want a health service that is fit for the 21st century. We will in no way however, buy into a process that is about cutting first and leaving people, especially those in rural areas, without access to the vital services they require.

The recent crises experienced in our Accident and Emergency Departments and elective care have been a result of this. People cannot see their GP quickly enough, feel like they cannot trust community healthcare initiatives and believe that often their only recourse is Accident and Emergency. The failure to strengthen community care and the reduction of Accident and Emergency services in tandem, has created long waiting lists for patients.

It is for these reasons that the SDLP will campaign for the full implementation of Transforming Your Care.

The SDLP continues to oppose the extension of the 1967 Act, will engage in the cross party working group and support the implementation of the Ministerial guidelines.

Primary Care

The SDLP recognises that health systems which are orientated towards primary care services achieve better health outcomes, with higher rate of patient satisfaction at a lower overall cost. General practice is the backbone of primary care and it is most effective when integrated across the wider primary care team, including nurses, pharmacists and other allied health professionals.

The failure to support primary care has led to difficulties in terms of GP recruitment and retention, a lack of capital investment in primary care facilities while at the same time there are increased workloads for GPs due to ever increasing demand for services.

The role of community pharmacies has been an integral issue in Transforming Your Care, and we believe that this role should be expanded at the earliest opportunity.

The SDLP is committed to:

- The redistribution of services from acute settings into community care as outlined in Transforming Your Care – totalling £83million worth of services.
- Increasing GP training places to 111 with the view of increasing the number of full-time equivalent GPs in Northern Ireland to 400 by 2020.
- Ensuring a cost of service budget is in place for community pharmacies and facilitating a more central role for them in GP practices.

Health Service Staff

The SDLP believes it is vital that proper workforce planning is put in place now to mitigate future demand for services, ensuring better health outcomes for patients and improving working conditions for staff.



The SDLP is committed to:

- A fair and well-deserved consolidated pay rise for our nursing staff and other medical staff.
- Opposing any punitive changes to junior doctors' contracts or nursing students' bursaries in Northern Ireland.
- Ensuring that independent sector care staff receive a proper hourly rate of pay for the services they provide.

Mental Health Provision

Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental ill-health than any other region of these islands. It is estimated that one in four adults here will suffer from a mental health problem at some stage in their life.

A research project undertaken by the Commission for Victims and Survivors and Ulster University found that a staggering 213,000 of the people in Northern Ireland suffer from some sort of mental illness and that almost half of these are directly related to the Troubles.

The SDLP is committed to:

- Ensuring sufficient funds are made available to improve mental health services as set out in the Bamford Review and that funding is ring-fenced from any budget cuts.
- Calling for a regional review of mental health services to examine the extent of which services are fragmented, especially in rural areas.

- Securing sufficient funding for the community and voluntary sector with a view to developing greater partnership working and collaboration with statutory agencies.
- Working in conjunction with the Department of Education, we must ensure that support and education are provided in post-primary schools to protect and promote mental wellbeing among our young people and teenagers.

North-South Healthcare

The SDLP is committed to pursuing, sharing knowledge and resources, solving common problems and working together to provide the best possible care and services.

We have already seen great advances in terms of Paediatric Cardiac Care moving to Dublin and this year we will see the opening of a new Cancer Radiotherapy Unit in Derry.

The SDLP believes this approach can be replicated across other health services to provide better health outcomes for all on this island.

The SDLP will be prioritising the following areas:

- Adult cardiac care services.
- Progressing all island cancer services and organ donation.
- The sharing of Ambulance services, including an Air Ambulance, and acute Emergency Departments across border regions.

We remain committed to the protection and retention of full A&E and stroke services at Daisy Hill hospital in Newry and the full A&E and cardiology services at the Downe Hospital. We want to sustain all other services there and plan for the provision of new services where capacity exists.

Older People's Health and Social Care

Northern Ireland's population is ageing meaning that demand for homecare services will continue to increase. The SDLP believes it is vital that sufficient and sustainable homecare services are in place, to

continue to meet the needs of older and disabled people in their own home. This also requires a well trained workforce and proper funding to ensure that patients' needs are met.

A crisis has emerged in the independent sector with many providers being in dispute over the hourly rate of care provided. Northern Ireland pays the lowest rate in the whole of the UK and this, along with staffing concerns, is impacting on the care that some of our older people receive on a daily basis.

The SDLP is committed to:

- Investing more in community services which will ultimately lead to the reduction of hospital admissions, allowing people to be cared for at home.
- Ending the inappropriate use of 15 minute home care visits.
- The introduction of a price regulator for domiciliary care hourly rate of pay that will review evidence to ensure that providers are paid enough to fulfil their contractual obligations while ensuring the Department of Health gets value for money.
- Introducing a fair rate of pay for independent care providers and provide a career structure to develop their skills and feel a sense of job satisfaction.
- Ensuring that sufficient legislation is passed in this mandate to protect the rights of older people in accessing services, including healthcare services.



Cancer Services

In the past ten years there has been a rise of more than 20% in cancer diagnoses in Northern Ireland. The chance of developing cancer by the age of 75 is now 1 in 3.4 for men and 1 in 3.8 for women.

To sustain the current level of services, the SDLP is supporting calls for the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce an overarching Cancer Strategy with clear measurable targets and timescales with sustained funding at its core.

The SDLP is also committed to:

- The introduction of a Cancer Drugs Fund for Northern Ireland.
- Ensuring Ministerial targets for urgent Breast Cancer referral and treatment are complied with.
- A 'Tobacco-free Northern Ireland' and the enactment of legislation banning smoking in cars with children.
- Calling for the HPV vaccination programme to be extended to include adolescent boys.

Autism Services

Early diagnosis is vital to ensure that people get access to services that will support them. Untreated conditions can significantly increase the impact on the individual, the health system and the community over a long term period.

The recognition of Autism has increased by 67% in school-age children, with 1 in 54 pupils attending school being diagnosed with ASD. However, this has not been accompanied with the necessary funding increase to bolster services.

The SDLP is committed to:

- The establishment of a ring-fenced Prevention and Early Intervention budget.
- A cross-departmental strategy with a shared objective in treating and supporting young children with Autism and other special educational needs.
- The proper funding of the Autism Act 2011 to ensure children with Autism and their families have the necessary support mechanisms in place.
- Reducing the current 20 month waiting list for autism diagnosis assessments.