

Consultation Survey: [Draft Programme for Government Consultation 2024-2027 - About you - Organisation - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#)

Consultation Draft Responses – PfG 2024

About you

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

(Required) Individual **On behalf of an organisation**

About you - Organisation

Please provide your organisation's contact details below:

Your organisation name and email address is collected for validation purposes.

Organisation name: [Cancer Focus Northern Ireland](#)

Organisation email address policy@cancerfocusni.org

Which of the following best describes the sector you work in?

This will assist us in monitoring the range of respondents the consultation has reached.

Statutory or Regulatory Body Arm's Length Body (ALB)

Organised interest Group: e.g. Education, Health, Business, Creative Industries, Environment, Community, Voluntary & Third sectors.

Business operator Local Government Government Department Trade Union Church or faith group

Media

Academia

Charity

Political Party

Other (please specify)

Can we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation?

This may be to follow up any specific points we need to clarify.

(Required) **Yes** No

Can we contact you in future about the draft Programme for Government?

For example, to provide you with a link to the results of this consultation, to inform you of further consultations or provide updated information on the Programme for Government.

(Required) **Yes** No

To support transparency in our decision making process, we will publish a summary of the consultation feedback on the PfG webpage. This will sometimes include the responses themselves and may mention names of the responding organisation (if applicable). However, names of individuals responding on a personal capacity will only be published where consent has been given. Please note we will not publish contact details.

(Required) **Yes, I consent to my name being published with my response** No, please remove my name before publishing my response

----- Skip Priority survey pages until third Priority, 'Cut Health Waiting Times' -----

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Cut Health Waiting Times'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Cut Health Waiting Times' should be included in the Programme for Government?

[More Information: 'Cut Health Waiting Times'](#)

Cut Health Waiting Times	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Cut Health Waiting Times'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

[More Information: 'Cut Health Waiting Times' Actions](#)

'Cut Health Waiting Times' Actions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Cut Health Waiting Times' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below

We welcome the inclusion of “Cut Health Waiting Times” in the Programme for Government and are relieved to see this being treated as the priority it is. The barriers to health care and long times to care access can be catastrophic not only to people’s health, but also to their ability to deliver in the workforce and more, therefore impacting domains far beyond health.

The long health waiting times are especially concerning because many health conditions get worse with more time untreated. This increases people’s pain, anxiety, and time away from work, while also creating more healthcare costs down the line, as conditions become more

complex, invasive, and potentially life-changing. For example, per recent cancer waiting time data, approximately 7 in 10 people are waiting longer than 2 months between urgent referral and first definitive treatment (compared to a target of 95% starting treatment in that timeframe). Anecdotally, we have also heard of further delays, including delays to GP appointments, for monitoring and follow-up care after cancer treatment, and between different treatment phases. For some cancers, these delays can be the difference between curative and palliative treatment; as a result of the delays, the health service is failing its people. It is also creating a two-tiered service where faster care is possible via the independent sector for those who can afford it.

Within this priority, we are glad to see the approved £76 million investment. While it is an important starting point, we fear it will not be enough. Even so, we are pleased to see that a specific focus will be on cancer and time-critical waiting lists, per the health risks above. However, we remain concerned by the acknowledgement that the current funding is not enough to reduce the lengthy waiting times, and that a lack of multi-year budgets may impede planning and initiatives, which could hurt efforts to reduce waiting times.

Furthermore, sustainably reducing the waiting times also requires transformation to a more efficient and effective health service. We are therefore glad to see such transformation also highlighted in the PfG as Priority 9. Through this transformation agenda, we hope that tangible interventions can be identified and acted upon.

Finally, we would like to see additional detail on how the waiting times will be cut (e.g., on specific interventions), and we appreciate the acknowledgement that multidisciplinary intervention is needed to reduce the waiting times.

----- Skip Priority survey pages until ninth / last Priority, 'Transformation' -----

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services' should be included in the Programme for Government?

More Information: 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services'

Reform and Transformation of Public Services	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

More Information: 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services'

'Reform and Transformation of Public Services' Actions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

As with Priority 3, we welcome that the reform and transformation of public services is included as a priority, and emphasise that it is necessary to delivering on the other PfG goals. For example, to reduce health waiting times and prevent them from increasing in the future, the health service needs to adapt to deliver its care as efficiently and effectively as possible. To this end, we are encouraged by the £235 million investment and the creation of the Transformation Board: hopefully, with this resourcing and a task force, the needed transformations can be identified and acted upon. We are further assured that this Fund is designed with the focus of making services better, more easily accessed, and more efficient, and that health is recognized as a public service under strain in need of transformation.

Within this priority, we further appreciate the recognition that NI's demography is changing toward an aging population, and that this will create additional social care pressures. We add that this will create additional health pressures more generally, as ill health (including cancer) becomes more prevalent with age. This creates a further need to better resource the service and transform toward a sustainable delivery model. This is important not only to provide for the needs of older citizens, who have been paying toward the service for decades, but also to make sure younger citizens are not neglected as a result of resource pressures resulting from the aging population.

In light of these service pressures, we are glad to see the community and voluntary sector recognised as a partner, and the acknowledgement that these partners are impacted by unpredictable funding. As a cancer charity, we fill gaps in the cancer journey that are not provided for by the Department of Health, despite being included within the NI Cancer Strategy. This includes work on cancer prevention (e.g., awareness building, stop smoking support), practical support (e.g., patient driving services, bra fitting for breast cancer patients), and psycho-oncological support during and after treatment. We greatly appreciate the monetary support and endorsements received to date from Health bodies including the Health Department and PHA, but we are concerned this funding may be at-risk despite ongoing patient need.

Regarding the potential for Reform and Transformation, we agree with the highlighted focuses of Prevention, Cost Saving, and Early Intervention, with "cost savings" hopefully tied to the ambition of optimising the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery models. In the cancer sphere, these are related: the more cancers we can prevent, and the more we can detect earlier, the less impact treatments will have on the patient and also on health services, as treatments become less complex and invasive. In keeping with these objectives, we hypothesize that there are opportunities to make better use of resources to meet patient demands. Some initiatives are already underway, for example with greater cross-Trust

collaboration to address breast cancer waiting times. We hope more opportunities to improve delivery will be identified and assessed.

Finally, we appreciate the promise of transparency and reports. Along with this, we urge collaboration with stakeholders. For health, this would include clinicians / Trust staff, patients, and third sector partners. Without genuine, open engagement with the subject matter experts who are responsible for delivering the services, transformation risks alienating key workers and making problems worse.

To conclude, we emphasise again that health could benefit from reforms in service delivery. Examples could include reviewing diagnostic pathways and commissioning models, to better follow patient needs. There are also opportunities relating to productivity as well as to digital, innovation, and research. For example, clinical trials, 'mole mapping' for skin cancer detection, expanded cancer screening programmes, genomics, and AI represent opportunities to improve health outcomes while aligning with this priority's objectives. Toward these ends, we support this priority and its focuses on implementing new approaches to planning, spending money more wisely, funding vital public services, and delivering stable and sustainable public finances.

Doing What Matters Most Today: Priorities

Are there any other priorities that should be included in the Programme for Government?

[More Information: Priorities](#)

Please enter any comments in the box below

We agree that the identified priorities represent the most urgent need for action, but add that the Reform and Transformation of Public Services should also include a focus on health promotion / disease prevention, early detection / intervention, and research. These are mentioned within the priority but cannot be ignored. For early detection in particular, this should include screening expansion, for example to allow risk-based screening and to lower the bowel cancer screening age to at minimum 50. For health promotion / disease prevention, this includes using awareness building, support services, and legislation to reduce the prevalence of smoking, obesity, and alcohol and to encourage uptake of the HPV and other cancer-relevant vaccines.

We would also like to see a commitment to delivering on the Strategies that are already in place but not yet resourced fully, for example the NI Cancer Strategy.

Building New Foundations

We are committed to investing in our public infrastructure and reshaping how our services are delivered.

Together, we will work as hard as we can to continue taking care of your needs today while supporting your hopes and ambitions for tomorrow through the high-quality, sustainable public services you deserve.

We will:

- Boost Housing Funds
- Improve the Planning System
- Deliver Better Public Services
- Support Our Net Zero Future
- Manage Our Water
- Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports
- Retrofit Homes
- Improve Our Transport Infrastructure for Safer Travel, Connected Communities and Sustainable Economic Growth

We are committed to investing £26 billion of public funding in the next decade. More detail on this will be provided in the upcoming Investment Strategy.

How much do you agree that these are the right commitments in relation to the plans for investment in infrastructure?

Strongly agree Agree **Neither agree nor disagree** Disagree Strongly disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the plans for investment in infrastructure:

Please enter any comments in the box below

We emphasise a need for improved health infrastructure. Some of our health infrastructure is no longer fit for purpose, which can lead to patient safety concerns (e.g., infection risk) while also impeding patient dignity and staff efficiency. The Belfast Trust haematology ward, which we understand is waiting for approval, and cytology slide reviews stand out as examples.

When investing in infrastructure, we also highlight the multidisciplinary nature of health priorities. For example, infrastructure can help promote good health by encouraging regular physical activity (e.g., through greenspaces, public transit, and foot and bike paths), by choosing construction materials with fewer toxins, and by providing sun protection for UV safety.

In general, we welcome the inclusion of “Deliver Better Public Services” in the list above.

Shaping a Better Tomorrow

While making things better today is important to us, we also need to look at long-term issues.

Our commitments are based on a recognition of our duty and drive to do better for you, your family, our communities and this place we all call home, now and for generations to come. Our focus will centre on three long-term Missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, as well as a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.

- **People:** Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities.
- **Planet:** Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society.
- **Prosperity:** Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, and our story continues to be an inspiration to others.
- **Peace:** Our cross-cutting commitment to Peace will make sure that everyone feels the benefit of a growing economy, improved environment, and fairer society.

More information can be found in the [Draft Programme for Government](#).

The Executive have set out a long-term strategy to deliver three Missions, People, Planet and Prosperity, as well as a cross-cutting commitment to Peace. How much do you agree with a Missions-based approach?

Strongly agree **Agree** Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Please enter any comments in the box below

[We support a missions-based approach as it could help ensure that work toward the priorities stays grounded in these underlying objectives, which we agree should be the main missions.](#)

How much do you agree that these are the right Missions to focus on?

People	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Planet	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Prosperity	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Are there any areas that are not captured under these missions?

We agree with these missions, but emphasise that people should include “health”, both in terms of care access and also fundamental rights that baseline health, including food security and stable housing.

We add that many of these missions are interconnected, for example with the environment (planet) capable of impacting health (people), and prosperity being tied to better health outcomes.

For prosperity, we hope that this mission will help individuals achieve personal prosperity instead of only economic prosperity for the region. For people’s lives to improve, they need to benefit from the mission toward prosperity (versus having economic growth deepen inequalities).

People Mission: A series of actions have been proposed under this Mission. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

More Information: People Mission

Strongly agree **Agree** Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Is there anything else that should be included under the People Mission?

We stress the importance of health to the “people” mission. Health is innately a person-oriented domain, as it is people who are impacted by poor health. Relatedly, we appreciate the acknowledgements of the Food Action Plan, Making Life Better, Live Better, obesity, and the social determinants of health within this priority.

We additionally emphasise that people have a role in helping to prevent diseases, which helps their own health while also reducing strain on our health services. For example, people can work to better health outcomes by not smoking, practicing good UV safety, refraining from alcohol, having a varied diet, and engaging in regular physical activity. When we think about how to help people, we also need to invest in health promotion to encourage these practices, such as through legislation, public awareness campaigns, and support services.

Finally, we add that addressing inequalities, including health inequalities, is an important element of uplifting people. This goes for deprivation but also for example with BAME, LGBTQ+, and other minority identity groups, who face their own health inequalities and challenges.

Planet Mission: A series of actions have been proposed under this Mission. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

More Information: Planet Mission

Strongly agree **Agree** Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Is there anything else that should be included under the Planet Mission?

The “planet” mission is additionally important because of the environment’s impact on health. For example, pollution can hurt health while getting access to green space can encourage physical activity, which in turn can boost health.

When thinking about the environment, it is also important to think about how the built and natural environment can contribute to health risk factors. For example, exposure to secondhand smoke and UV radiation increases people’s cancer risk. We can help reduce this risk by extending smokefree environments and creating place for shade from sun protection.

Prosperity Mission: A series of actions have been proposed under this Mission. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

[More Information: Prosperity Mission](#)

Strongly agree **Agree** Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Is there anything else that should be included under the Prosperity Mission?

As with people and planet, prosperity has ties with health outcomes. For example, the NI Cancer Registry reports that cancer incidence in the most socio-economically deprived areas are 5.4% higher than the NI average. Similarly, cancer risk factors, such as smoking, are found at greater incidence in more deprived areas. Therefore, it is important to make sure that regional prosperity translates to individual prosperity (versus strengthening inequalities).

At the same time, cancer and other health problems create costs for individuals and families: in addition to potentially requiring time away from work, they may create extra costs for travel, home heating, and more. Cancer can also lead to financial discrimination, including higher insurance and other financial package prices for cancer patients, even for patients that are in remission. By working toward prosperity, lifting people out of poverty, providing additional support for families, and safeguarding against financial discrimination through legislation, we can help limit the financial costs of cancer on people’s lives.

A commitment to Peace will underpin the three missions (People, Planet and Prosperity). A series of actions have been proposed under this commitment. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

[More Information: Commitment to Peace](#)

Strongly agree **Agree** Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Is there anything else that should be included under the commitment to Peace?

[No comment]

Peace is framed as a cross-cutting commitment, rather than a mission. How much do you agree that this is the right structure?

Strongly agree **Agree** Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Please enter any comments in the box below

We agree with an approach to peace underlined by commitments to people, planet, and prosperity.

Understanding Missions by Tracking Wellbeing

The draft Programme for Government outlines how it will measure progress through a Wellbeing Framework. How much do you agree with the proposed approach?

[More Information: Wellbeing Framework](#)

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response

We appreciate the use of the Wellbeing Framework and agree with the focus this will lend to the PfG's implementation: it will allow the government to work to improve people's wellbeing.

Do you have any further comments relevant to this consultation?

Please enter any additional comments in the box below

As previously mentioned, we welcome the inclusion of "Cut Health Waiting Times" and "Reform and Transformation of Public Services" as priorities. These are essential to easing health inequalities, keeping Northern Ireland healthy, and fulfilling the promise of the NHS. In so doing, it also enables the PfG's other goals, for example by keeping the NI workforce and NI parents healthy and able to contribute.

We remain concerned that the PfG acknowledges that funding pressures mean "we cannot afford to do everything that needs to be done," and that we are still limited to single-year funding envelopes. The latter in particular puts at risk the long-term planning efforts necessary to achieving the target changes. Given these limitations, we urge the government and public services to review delivery models to make sure they are working as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet current gaps and to prepare for identified future gaps.