

Robin Swann
Minister of Health
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT4 3SQ

26 May 2022

Dear Health Minister

Today (26 May 2022) marks 1000 days since the public consultation on Reshaping Stroke Care closed. While there has been some welcome progress over the past three years, such as the expansion of the thrombectomy service, other commitments made in 2019 are yet to be acted on or fully implemented. These include commitments to remove the variance in thrombolysis, reshape stroke services, improve rehabilitation and long-term support, and undertake a stroke workforce review.

This has left people affected by stroke and many hard-working, dedicated stroke professionals without answers and uncertain of what the future holds for stroke care in Northern Ireland. To add to this uncertainty, it was very disappointing to see the reshaping of stroke services mentioned as a 'critical scheme' that could not be commenced in the proposed 22-25 budget period due to financial constraints.

We, the undersigned, all firmly believe that people affected by stroke in Northern Ireland deserve the same ambitious vision and plans for stroke care as have been set out by other parts of the UK over the past few years. The new Assembly mandate presents a golden opportunity to get stroke back on the agenda. As your Department highlighted in 2019, our current model of stroke care "*fails users*" and so we must urgently work together to set out an ambitious vision for the future direction of stroke services and progress with much-needed stroke transformation.

It's clear that transforming how we deliver stroke care aligns with current policy direction and aims – it was highlighted as a priority action in the 2016 Bengoa report, the 2017 Delivering Together report and the 2020 New Decade, New Approach agreement. All political parties have also emphasised the importance of health and social care reform and implementing the Bengoa recommendations in their election manifestos. As well as the potential to save lives and improve outcomes for patients, investing in the reform of our stroke services could also

result in cost savings for the Department in the future. This would help to make services more sustainable, which is crucial as we rebuild health and social care.

The signatories of this letter would therefore like to see the below initial actions taken forward without delay:

- The analysis of the over 19,000 responses to the 2019 Reshaping Stroke Care consultation publicly released, alongside the Minister's response; and
- Revised targets, timescales and costed implementation plans set out for achieving the 2019 Reshaping Stroke Care commitments. These should take account of learning from the pandemic and build on the positive progress already made with the expansion of the thrombectomy service.

We believe this will clearly highlight to the Northern Ireland stroke community the new Assembly's commitment to making stroke a priority and to improving stroke prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and long-term support.

Following this, we'd like to see engagement with the stroke community to co-produce an ambitious future vision and national plan for stroke care in Northern Ireland with short, medium and long-term goals that cover the whole stroke pathway. This work should also consider how best to address gaps in support for children affected by stroke. Only through true co-production and collaboration alongside renewed ambition and bold decision-making will we be able to tackle the various challenges facing health and social care and achieve the world-class stroke services that the people of Northern Ireland deserve.

The wide variety of signatories to this letter shows the range of individuals, organisations and bodies who have an interest in stroke and who stand ready to work with your Department to progress stroke transformation. Between us, we have a wealth of experience and expertise and can provide you and your Department with insight and evidence from service users and stroke professionals as well as opportunities to engage with these groups to ensure the future of stroke services in Northern Ireland is truly coproduced.

Northern Ireland must not be left behind when it comes to progressive and ambitious stroke prevention, treatment and care. We do not underestimate the challenges ahead but we are ready and willing to help you and your Department to ensure that our stroke services can provide the high-quality care that patients need and deserve, both now and in the future.

Kind regards,

Alasdair O'Hara, Associate Director Northern Ireland, **Stroke Association**

Juliet Bouverie, Chief Executive, **Stroke Association**

Stephen King, Chair of Trustees, **Stroke Association**

Virgina McVey, **Stroke Association Trustee & Chair of Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Avril Drummond, **Stroke Association Trustee**

Ian Lee, **Stroke Association Trustee**

Peter Deazley, **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Dr Niamh Kennedy, **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Anne Gamble, **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Dr G. Sloan, **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Brian Symington, **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group** and Chair of **Sense NI**

Anna McCracken, **Stroke survivor** and member of the **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Rosemary Valente, **Stroke survivor** and member of the **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Paul McLean, **Stroke Survivor** and member of **Stroke Association NI Advisory Group**

Dr J. Kelly, **Retired Stroke Physician**

Declan Cunnane, Chief Executive, **Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke**

Dr Patricia Gordon, Chair, **NIMAST**

Ruth Sedgewick, Head of Northern Ireland Office, **Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists**

Fearghal McKinney, Head of **British Heart Foundation Northern Ireland**

Steve Ford, Chief Executive, **Royal College of Occupational Therapists**

Dr Paschal McKeown, Charity Director, **Age NI**

David Galloway, Chair, **Northern Ireland Neurological Charities Alliance**

Andy Burman, Chief Executive, **British Dietetic Association**

Craig Harrison, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, **Carers NI**

Lisa Turan, CEO, **Child Brain Injury Trust**

Orchard Women After Stroke Group

South Down Stroke Group

North & West Belfast Stroke Group

Foyle Stroke Support Group

+ 35 other stroke survivors, carers, volunteers and stroke professionals who want to see action

