



10 January 2025

Current Health and Social Care Services Pressures

RQIA, Northern Ireland's regulator for health and social care, is acutely aware of the current extreme pressures on the health and social care system, through engagement with HSC Trusts, professional bodies, trade unions, service users and their families; and through issues highlighted in the media and social media.

As regulator, RQIA is mindful of the impact of these issues on patients and on the staff across emergency and unscheduled care services including: Emergency Departments, NI Ambulance Service, and hospital wards; in primary care; and in care homes and social care services across Northern Ireland.

RQIA has taken a number of steps to offer support to the wider health and social care system at this time:

- RQIA has contacted HSC Trust Chief Executives, offering our support, and inviting them to raise any additional steps that RQIA could take within its scope to help alleviate system pressures.
- In November 2024, RQIA published and issued guidance for HSC Trusts and care home providers on the registration and categories of care in nursing and residential care homes, and how to plan for any variation of these based on patient/residents' needs.
- RQIA has recently provided additional guidance to HSC Trusts and care home providers on safely accepting patients who are discharged from hospital at weekends or public holidays, where a care home is not registered for the specific category of care. It is imperative that every patient receives the right care, at the right time, in the right place to effectively meet their needs.
- RQIA recognises the importance of the Post-Falls Guidelines for Care Homes, developed by the Northern Ireland Frailty Network, published in late 2023, which we have reissued to all care homes. It should be noted that, in line with the post-fall pathways, care homes are not automatically required to call an ambulance or transfer a patient to hospital after a fall. We understand that this guidance has demonstrated some success in avoiding unnecessary ambulance calls and admissions to hospitals from care homes.

ENDS

For further information, contact Malachy Finnegan, RQIA Senior Communications Manager, email: malachy.finnegan@rqia.org.uk