Version 2.1

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Plan

Co-produced by Northern Ireland Cancer Research Consumer Forum, Northern Ireland Cancer Trials Network & Belfast Experimental Cancer Medicine Centre

September 2026

ecmc Belfast

NICTN CANCER TRIALS NETWORK

NORTHERN IRELAND CANCER RESEARCH CONSUMER FORUM

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Introduction

The impetus to co-produce this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Plan stems from a public workshop held in Belfast, February 2025, delivered by the Northern Ireland Cancer Research Consumer Forum (NICRCF) and partners. The report of the event, which was part of a Macmillan funded project 'Close the Cancer Care Gap', illustrates the valuable insights gathered and indicates there is much to do! A NICRCF / Northern Ireland Cancer Trials Network (NICTN) / Belfast Experimental Cancer Medicine Centre (ECMC) working-group has helped to produce this Plan in conjunction with partners, incorporating both public perspectives and best practice guidance specific to clinical research.

In 2024 the HSC R&D Division of the Public Health Agency and the University of Oxford Centre for Research Equity produced a partnership Manifesto.

The NICTN and Belfast ECMC have subscribed to the Northern Ireland Partnership Manifesto.

Northern Ireland Partnership Manifesto

'The vision of this partnership is to advocate for research practices that prioritise inclusivity, equity, and meaningful engagement with diverse and underserved* communities in Northern Ireland. Improving and embedding health literacy in clinical research in Northern Ireland, with a focus on patient and public involvement, will be central to the partnership aims.'

*See page 4

"We will continue to work to ensure that there is equity of access to the cancer trials portfolio across NI and that the trials portfolio is available to a diverse population representative of the NI population."

Professor Stuart McIntosh, Clinical Director, NICTN

"We will increase access to experimental cancer medicine clinical trials, working with our patients and partner organisations in NI and across the ECMC network to identify the barriers and challenges to trial participation to ensure inclusivity and development of cancer treatments that benefit those who are in greatest need."

Professor Vicky Coyle, Clinical Lead, Belfast ECMC

Manifesto statements to develop equitable research for Northern Ireland

The Manifesto (see Figure 1) will be one of our guides to practice and progress, along with other relevant resources.



Figure 1: Manifesto Statements, Northern Ireland Partnership Manifesto, June 2024

This plan does not seek to create new EDI guidelines, but rather to promote actions to support best practice, as it applies to cancer research delivery and PPI in NI, and introduce monitoring to ensure this is sustained. EDI, PPI and people-centred clinical research go hand-in-hand.



Figure 2: Hallmarks of Good People-Centred Clinical Research. Health Research Authority. May 2024

We will continue to develop and refine this EDI Plan due to the evolving nature of this arena, and we continue to welcome your comments and suggestions. For more information contact us at nictn@belfasttrust.hscni.net

*Who are "under-served" communities?

In research 'underserved communities' can be wide-ranging. We use the National Institutes of Health Research (NIHR) guidance Improving inclusion of under-served groups in clinical research: Guidance from INCLUDE project | NIHR

'The work of the NIHR-INCLUDE project shows that there is no single definition for an under-served group. Some key characteristics that are common to several under-served groups are:

- Lower inclusion in research than one would expect from population estimates
- High healthcare burden that is not matched by the volume of research designed for the group
- Important differences in how a group responds to or engages with healthcare interventions compared to other groups, with research neglecting to address these factors

The key idea here is that the definition of 'under-served' is highly context-specific; it will depend on the population, the condition under study, the question being asked by research teams, and the intervention being tested. No single, simple definition can encompass all under-served groups.'

EDI Objectives and Action Plan

EDI Objectives

1. Create equity of access to the cancer trials portfolio across Northern Ireland (NI)
2. Increase access by opening more clinical trials for patients in Northern Ireland, including experimental cancer medicine clinical trials
3. Minimise the need to travel beyond NI to access trials, but where appropriate facilitate pathways for patients to participate in trials in Great Britain (GB) and Republic of Ireland (RoI)
4. Identify and remove barriers to trial participation and cancer research PPI
5. Train and support NICTN/Belfast ECMC staff to promote diverse and inclusive research design and participation in cancer trials/research
6. Increase patient and public awareness, understanding and participation in cancer research and PPI
7. Improve equality of opportunity in cancer research PPI through a range of means including outreach to local communities and “under-served” groups
8. Put in place a means of evaluation to monitor the impact of the action plan

EDI Action Plan

Objective 1: Create equity of access to the cancer trials portfolio across Northern Ireland (NI)	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
1.1 Implement agreed actions associated with equity of access to trials in NI following Blood Cancer UK funded project stakeholder event (Improving access to clinical trials in Northern Ireland | Blood Cancer UK)	Research / Service improvements implemented where identified	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/ Haematology service	Stakeholder event held June 2026 Implementation of project service improvement plan Review June 2027
1.2 Promote decentralised patient-centred trial implementation where sponsors enable this	Trial activities are as close-to-home for patients as possible. Minimise geographical barriers	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/ Cancer Services across NI	On-going and review annually
1.3 Promote NICTN/Belfast ECMC inclusion in cancer research/PPI that is focused on understanding or reducing barriers to cancer care or research	Enhance equality, diversity and inclusion in research and PPI in NI	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF	On-going and review annually
1.4 Network with HSC Research and Development (HSC R&D) EDI Lead and research /PPI networks/partners regarding EDI research and experience	NICTN/Belfast ECMC sustains best practice/knowledge/practice and works effectively in cross-cutting EDI themes	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	On-going and review annually

EDI Action Plan

Objective 1 continued: Create equity of access to NI cancer trials portfolio across NI	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
1.5 Annual comparative analysis of NI Multiple Deprivation Measures in patients approached about Belfast ECMC portfolio studies	Identify any barriers and plan actions	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	End March 2027 and annually
1.6 Advocate with study sponsors and partners for payments and patient-centred payment processes for out-of-pocket expenses associated with research participation	Minimise exclusion from cancer trial participation due to financial burden of e.g. hospital visits/travel	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	On-going review annually
1.7 Recruit, induct and develop NICTN Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Clinical Research Nurse	Increased AYA access to cancer research and participation in NI	NICTN	By 2027 and review annually

EDI Action Plan

Objective 2: Increase access by opening more clinical trials for patients in Northern Ireland, including experimental cancer medicine clinical trials.	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
2.1 Apply the NICTN Strategy (link pending) infrastructure model and efficiency plans	Maximise capacity and efficiency in cancer clinical research delivery in NI	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	On-going per NICTN Strategy. Review annually
2.2 Expand the number of NICTN Clinical Study Groups (in line with NICTN strategy) 2026	More multi-professional and PPI partnerships shaping trial portfolios by cancer type in NI	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	On-going. Review June 2027
2.3 Seek and utilise clinical research funding opportunities and workforce	Increase cancer clinical research workforce resilience enabling sustainable research delivery in NI	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	On-going and review annually

EDI Action Plan

Objective 3: Minimise the need to travel beyond NI to access trials, but where appropriate facilitate pathways for patients to participate in trials in Great Britain (GB) and Republic of Ireland (RoI)	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
3.1 Benchmark equity of available cancer trials portfolio against disease areas for NI cancer population versus GB/ROI counterparts	Indicate where inequities occur to advocate for / implement strategies to address this	NICTN/HSC cancer services/funders	Review annually following baseline data collection (Action 3.1)
3.2 Working with NI Cancer Research Strategic Framework Advisory Board and collaborators – enhance transparency of process and support mechanisms for access to GB trials for cancer patients in NI	Increase facilitation of NI/GB/RoI clinical research opportunities and activity	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	End 2027 and on-going. Review annually
3.3 Develop robust data collection around NI/GB research activity	Increase understanding of NI/GB/RoI clinical research opportunities and activity	NICTN/Belfast ECMC	End 2027 and on-going. Review annually

EDI Action Plan

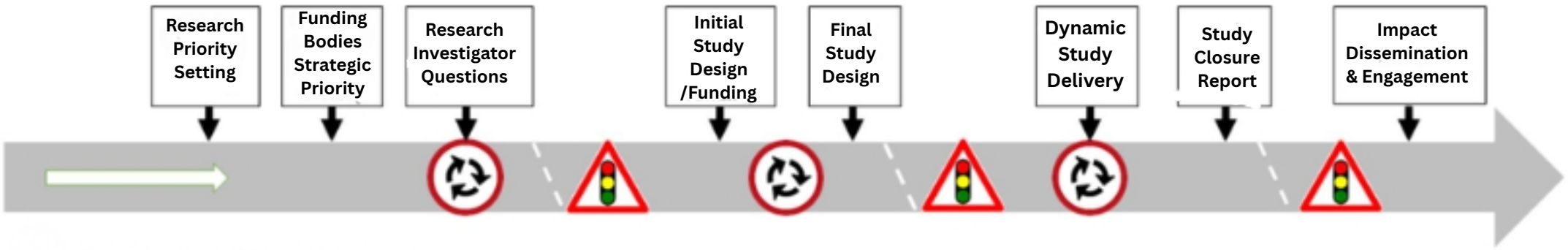
Objective 4: Identify and remove barriers to trial participation and cancer research PPI	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
4.1 Working with NI Cancer Registry (NICR), NI cancer trial management data, census and other relevant data sources, analyse equity of research participation according to available equality factors, producing baseline data and process for monitoring	Understand NI population diversity and implication for cancer trials	NICTN/NICR	Baseline data and monitoring plan completed by mid-2027
4.2 Develop and maintain links with stakeholders e.g. patients/carers/researchers/HSC R&D/charities/Trust Community Development team/NI Cancer Registry/ NiCAN to utilise data, increase understanding and outreach opportunities with “under-served” groups	Increase understanding of barriers to taking part in research locally	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF	Ongoing and review annually

EDI Action Plan

Objective 5: Train and support NICTN/Belfast ECMC staff to promote diverse and inclusive research design and participation in cancer trials/research	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
5.1 NICTN clinical staff induction includes training on the importance of PPI and EDI in research	Diverse and inclusive participation and PPI in cancer trials and other high quality research in NI	PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Development of training package by April 2027 On-going evaluation and annual review
5.2 NICTN staff will complete appropriate training: Mandatory Equality, Good Relations and Human Rights - 90% compliance from September 2026, "An Introduction to Cultural Competence" - 50% compliance by September 2027 and 90% by September 2028. Senior Management team will promote additional EDI training as appropriate e.g. Neurodiversity Awareness training.	Diverse and inclusive participations in cancer trials and other high quality research in NI promoted	All NICTN staff and line managers	All staff undertake training within 12 months of role. Review annually
5.3 NICTN clinical staff induction includes NICTN Guidelines 'Guidance when a Potential Research Participant does not have Proficient English'	Diverse and inclusive participations in cancer trials and other high quality research in NI promoted	All NICTN clinical staff and line managers	On-going and 2 yearly review
5.4 Belfast ECMC and Research Management Service (RMS) review and facilitate INCLUDE guidance* in study design. *See Figure 3	Diverse and inclusive participations in cancer trials and other high quality research in NI promoted	Belfast ECMC RMS/ local Investigators	On-going and review annually
5.5 Promote NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF representation at joint working group meetings for specific projects with EDI focus e.g. QUB / HSC R&D	Diverse and inclusive participation and PPI in cancer trials and other high quality research in NI	PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	On-going and review annually



Involved stakeholders: patients, public, funders, clinicians, researchers, regulators, industry, policymakers





Checkpoints for decision making processes



Collaborative, interactive engagement with stakeholders in prioritisation, design and delivery



Tools and processes:

- Building community-partnered participatory research over the long term
- Training resources for stakeholders
- Infrastructure and systems to recruit and retain participants from underserved groups
- Removing funding, policy and regulatory barriers to inclusion

***Figure 3. NIHR (2020) Improving inclusion of under-served groups in clinical research: Guidance from the NIHR-INCLUDE project. UK: NIHR**

EDI Action Plan

Objective 6: Increase patient and public awareness, understanding and participation in cancer research and PPI	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
6.1 Complete planned outreach activities 'Art with a side of Conversation' as part of Blood Cancer UK funded project (Improving access to clinical trials in Northern Ireland | Blood Cancer UK)	Increased awareness of blood cancers and research	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF	Concluding evaluation September 2026
6.2 Establish working group to deliver on the action points below: • Update NICRCF/NICTNBelfast ECMC promotional materials • Develop Cancer Trials NI website, co-designed with NICRCF members to include EDI • Include a NICRCF purpose/aims statement on website Include PPI stories on website • Review social media presence for NICTN/NICRCF/Belfast ECMC. Minimum 1 post per week • Seek funding opportunities to support professional and effective communications • Work in partnership with key stakeholders to share and promote resources on media platforms/social media	Promote health and research literacy through cancer research awareness and accessible communications	NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	End 2026/27 and review annually
6.3 Support research/PPI awareness campaigns and maximise networking where relevant	Support embedding research awareness and EDI	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF	On-going and review annually

EDI Action Plan

Objective 7: Improve equality of opportunity in cancer research PPI through a range of means including outreach to local communities and underserved groups.	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
7.1 Collaborate with partners to build networks. Seek funding to maintain community outreach activities	Build meaningful and enduring relationships with a diverse range of communities in NI	NICTN/Belfast ECMC /NICRCF representatives	Ongoing and review quarterly
7.2 Led by evidence of under-served communities – support positive PPI recruitment as required to support specific research	Increased diversity within NICRCF membership. Recruit 1-3 new members from “under-served” communities	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Ongoing and review quarterly
7.3 Develop a targeted programme of community outreach activities to engage and build relationships with a range of communities/groups, such as Adolescents and Young Adults, Black/African/Caribbean population, LGBTQIA+, rural, geographical spread, disability	Equality of opportunity for PPI in cancer research	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Ongoing and review quarterly
7.4 Seek and support opportunities for funding of PPI and work in partnership with stakeholders e.g. HSC R&D, UU, QUB, cancer charities etc	Address barriers to PPI so that it is more accessible to all sections of the community	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	End 2026/27 and review annually.

EDI Action Plan

Objective 7 continued: Improve equality of opportunity in cancer research PPI through a range of means including outreach to local communities and underserved groups	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
7.5 Provide effective access to financial support for PPI e.g. up-front car parking/travel, straight forward and timely reimbursement of expenses – link with PPI department in Trust	Address barriers to PPI so that it is more accessible to all sections of the community	NICTN/Belfast ECMC /NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Ongoing and review annually
7.6 Co-design information for early career researchers on good working practices for PPI in cancer research	Address barriers to PPI so that it is more accessible all sections of the community	NICTN/Belfast ECMC NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Ongoing and review annually
7.7 Establish relationships and champions within communities who would assist with promoting cancer trials and guide/support accessible communication	Address barriers to PPI so that it is more accessible to all sections of the community	NICTN/Belfast ECMC /NICRCF PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Ongoing and review annually
7.8 Utilise interpreting services as required e.g. to support research participants, NICRCF members, to facilitate PPI and community outreach	Address barriers to PPI so that it is more accessible all sections of the community	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF, PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	Ongoing and review annually

EDI Action Plan

Objective 8: Put in place a means of evaluation to monitor the impact of the EDI action plan	Planned outcome	Responsibility	Timeline
8.1 Monitor diversity and inclusion of NICRCF membership	Identify and address any gaps in diversity	PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	On-going and review annually
8.2 Track and record NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF outputs using the Public Involvement in Research Impact Toolkit (PIRIT)	Assure compliance with PPI standards	NICRCF, PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	On-going and review annually
8.3 Share actions and impact through annual reports	Increased visibility and public awareness of activity	PPI Lead and Cancer Research PPI and Engagement Manager	End 2026/27 and review annually
8.2 Utilise relevant opportunities engaging with decision-makers to advocate for mandatory collection of ethnicity and other equality factors in cancer healthcare records	Increased ability to monitor equity of access to cancer trials and relevant services	HSC R&D & NICTN	On-going and review annually
8.4 Evaluate new EDI activities and update EDI plan accordingly	Sustain a 'living' EDI action plan that continuously learns and evolves from experience	NICTN/Belfast ECMC/NICRCF	On-going and review annually

Resources - links to a sample of current guidance and resources (UK and Ireland)

There are a multitude of resources about EDI in research and PPI. Some resources are highlighted below.

- University of Oxford's Centre for Research Equity Launches Historic Partnership to Advance Health Equity in Northern Ireland | Public Health Agency - Research & Development in Northern Ireland
- Improving inclusion of under-served groups in clinical research: Guidance from INCLUDE project | NIHR
- The INCLUDE Ethnicity Framework • Trial Forge
- The INCLUDE Impaired Capacity to Consent Framework • Trial Forge
- The INCLUDE Socioeconomic Disadvantage Framework • Trial Forge
- How to include older people in health and social care research • Trial Forge
- Increasing the diversity of people taking part in research - Health Research Authority
- https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/marie-curie-research-centre/patient-and-public-involvement/public-involvement-in-research-impact-toolkit-pirit
- NIHR Race Equality Framework | NIHR
- Guidance for developing and submitting an inclusion and diversity plan second draft - Health Research Authority
- STEP-UP_Strategies_for_Trialists_Report-1.pdf
- EDI Toolkit NIHR Research Support Service, Leicester and Partners Resources
- draft-edi-strategy-for-consultation-final-feb26.pdf , Queen's University Belfast
- Addressing the barriers to people-centred clinical research
- Hallmarks of good people-centred clinical research People-Centred Clinical Research project executive summary HRA, May 2024
- A Friendly Guide to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) 6781-EDI-Guide-v5-sm.pdf Rare Disease Clinical Trial Network, Health Research Charities Ireland
- FINAL Anyone can co-produce health and care research Patchatt, 2025
- Hatch S, Fitzgibbon J, Tonks AJ, Forty L. Diversity in patient and public involvement in healthcare research and education—realising the potential. Health Expect. 2023;27:e13896. doi:10.1111/hex.13896 HEX-27-e13896.pdf