



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



NIAS Winter Plan

2025/26



Introduction and Background

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) plays a vital role in ensuring the safe, effective, and compassionate delivery of pre-hospital and emergency care across Northern Ireland. Each year, the autumn and winter period brings additional operational pressures across the health and social care system, including higher levels of acute illness, increased demand on emergency departments, and sustained challenges in patient flow and discharge.

This plan sets out the actions, priorities, and enablers that will support the Service's response to these pressures while maintaining patient safety and staff wellbeing. It aligns directly with regional system priorities agreed across Health and Social Care (HSC) partners and reflects our commitment to collaborative working, innovation, and resilience during the most challenging months of the year.

The following section, "NIAS Response to System Priorities," summarises the specific actions and deliverables that will be implemented across autumn and winter 2025–26 in collaboration with Trusts, Primary Care, and other system **partners**.



NIAS Response to System Priorities

To align with the system's priorities, NIAS will implement a programme of deliverables during autumn/winter 2025–26. These can be summarised as follows:

a) Reducing avoidable demand and increasing use of appropriate pathways

NIAS will expand its Complex Case Team to manage patients who make frequent use of 999 services. By proactively case-managing these individuals and linking them to community and primary care services, we will reduce repeated calls and conveyances. In parallel, enhancements to call triage, including segmentation of low-acuity calls and deployment of Mental Health Practitioners within the Clinical Hub, will ensure more patients are directed to appropriate pathways at the earliest point of contact.

b) Reducing hospital handovers and releasing capacity

Working with Trust partners, NIAS is embedding direct referral options into Hospital @ Home services, enabling crews to hand patients safely into community-based care rather than defaulting to hospital EDs. In addition, the expansion of the Clinical Support Manager role to 24/7 coverage within the Emergency Operations Centre will strengthen clinical oversight and reduce the number of unnecessary ED conveyances, thereby helping alleviate pressures at the front door of hospitals. NIAS will also increase HALO cover at the main ED's throughout Northern Ireland.

c) Increasing Hear & Treat and See & Treat rates

NIAS is broadening the use of Dispatch Code Reference tables to improve categorisation of calls during peak demand and ensure resources are targeted where they add most value. In addition, Regional Pathway Leads are embedding alternative pathways across the organisation, providing education and oversight to increase staff confidence in non-conveyance decisions. For specific patient groups, new models such as a digitised Falls Pathway and alignment to the latest PHA post-falls guidance will allow safe, timely, and appropriate care without the need for ED attendance.



d) Minimising reliance on acute and ED care

Through the full deployment of Advanced Paramedics, NIAS will expand its ability to manage falls, frailty, and care needs in the community. These practitioners, supported by targeted training and education programmes, will be able to safely treat or refer patients to community services, avoiding conveyance to hospital. Collectively, these measures reinforce the ambition of shifting care away from acute settings and closer to home, wherever it is clinically safe and appropriate to do so.

e) Ensuring staff resilience and wellbeing throughout the winter period

Recognising the critical importance of staff health and resilience during periods of sustained operational pressure, NIAS will implement a focused programme of measures to support staff wellbeing throughout the winter months. Central to this will be the provision of the seasonal flu vaccination to all staff, helping to protect the workforce and ensure continuity of patient care across all operational areas.



In addition, NIAS will continue to promote access to psychological support, peer wellbeing initiatives, and occupational health services. Managers will be encouraged to maintain proactive engagement with teams, ensuring staff have access to adequate rest, hydration, and welfare facilities during prolonged periods of high demand.