



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust

Winter Plan 2023/24

NIAS Locality Plan – Winter 2023/ 24

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) experiences significant operational challenges throughout the year due to a range of factors. Nonetheless, the forthcoming winter months will be a challenging time across NIAS, primary care, hospital services and community services and specific actions are being taken to coordinate and respond to patient and service user needs. As always, health and social care relies on the dedication and resilience of all our staff who continue to support new initiatives while delivering existing services with compassion and care.

Below we set out some of the agreed locality actions to support the additional pressures expected over winter. As a NI system, a regional coordination control will ensure the Ambulance Service, Primary and Secondary Care work together to enhance patient flow and reduce service pressures.

The NIAS Locality plan has been developed with the following three regional priorities for the winter period:

- Maximising ambulance capacity.
- Reducing time spent by patients in emergency departments.
- Timely hospital discharge from patients who are medically fit for discharge.

NIAS's primary focus within the Locality plan is to maximise ambulance capacity across the region and support Trusts with timely discharge of medically fit patients.

Maximising Ambulance Capacity

To support this regional priority, NIAS is concentrating on ensure the right response is available to patients and service users. To deliver this, NIAS is developing some key roles within the Clinical Support Desk function, to enhance clinical assessment of patients using the service. We have introduced several Clinical Safety managers into our Control room and the Support desk function is being grown in a multi-disciplinary approach.

Furthermore, NIAS is working along with Secondary care Trusts to introduce mental health expertise within the Emergency Ambulance control room. This is to ensure these patients received the right care at the right time.

This Winter maximising alternative pathways into hospital services and avoiding Emergency Department arrival across the region will be key to both ambulance capacity but also reducing time spent in Emergency departments by patients. NIAS are working with Trusts across the region to enhance these patient care pathways in both the Acute and Community settings, so that patients can receive the necessary care in the most appropriate place.

Finally, NIAS are committed to providing Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officers (HALOs), at the major Emergency departments, as well as working with trust to identify suitable Ambulance handover areas, within or near Emergency Departments. This will allow Ambulance handovers to be expedited and avoid any unnecessary prolonged delays outside Emergency Departments.

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Timely Hospital Discharge

The timely discharge of patients from all health care facilities is a key component to deliver flow across the health care system. NIAS will work to provide timely transportation for all discharges from all the facilities across the region.

Workforce

None of the actions outlined in this plan are possible without our staff and workforce pressures remain critical, with the prospect of further industrial action over the autumn and winter months. NIAS will continue to support the health and wellbeing of our staff, in conjunction with trade union colleagues, with the continued delivery of:

- Welfare facilities being available at Emergency Departments.
- Development of a maximising attendance plan.
- Implementation of plans to minimise late finishes for crews.
- Continued peer support for crews in challenging circumstances.

Financial Constraints

With limited funding and significant existing pressures, we will continue to identify any emerging financial pressures during this winter period. The Trust will continue to assess any resource requirements and use established channels and processes with the Department of Health to secure additional resources as required.

NIAS will continue to work with partners across the region to deliver on this Locality plan to develop safe services for our patients and service users. We do recognise, however, that this winter will be an extremely challenging period for not only NIAS but all partners. NIAS will continue to report where there are specific service issues and work to minimise the impact that these have on patients and service users.

What the Public can do to help over Winter

If you become ill or injured and need medical help or advice, choose well by using the right health service for your needs.

Play your part help our Health and Care Service

Please choose the service most appropriate for your symptoms



Selfcare - to treat an ache, pain, upset stomach, cough or cold, get plenty of rest, take simple pain killers if needed and use over-the-counter medicines.



Your local pharmacist - they are there to give confidential, expert advice and can treat a number of minor ailments such as aches and pains, skin conditions, allergies, eye conditions or upset stomach and emergency contraception.



Your GP - they will give expert medical advice and diagnosis, referring you for further care or consultation as needed.



Primary Eyecare Assessment & Referral Service - treats sudden eye conditions such as red eyes, sudden reduction in vision, eye pain or a foreign body in the eye.

Go to: <https://online.hscni.net/our-work/ophthalmic-services/eyes/>



Mental Healthcare - if you experiencing mental health difficulties there are a range of services available to help you.

Go to: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/mental-health-support>



Emergency Dental Treatment - if patients have an urgent dental need then they can follow the advice on the HSC website.

<https://online.hscni.net/our-work/dental-services/out-of-hours-emergency-dental-treatment/>



Minor Injuries Unit - treats injuries that are not life threatening such as broken bones, sprains, bites and burns.



Urgent Care Centres - treats injuries that are not life threatening such as broken bones, sprains, minor scalp wounds and suturing of minor wounds.



Emergency Department - provides the highest level of emergency care for patients, especially those with acute illnesses or trauma, such as heart attacks, stroke, serious accidents or head injuries.

Call 999 when there is a risk to life or serious injury.



Your support is vital at this critical time.

Choosing well ensures you receive the right care at the right time and that emergency medical care is available to those people who need it the most.

<https://nias.hscni.net/calling-999/choose-well/>



Maximising Ambulance Capacity

Introduction of Clinical Safety Managers within our Emergency Ambulance Control (EAC) room to improve appropriate responses to patients.

Grow the Clinical Support Desk capability and capacity through a multidisciplinary approach to provide the right response to our patients.

Develop a regional approach with key stakeholders to introduce mental health expertise within the EAC room, to support the needs of our mental health patients.

Maximise use of available alternative pathways across the region, so that patients can access the most appropriate care in a timely manner.

Working with stakeholders to identify new pathways to support patients.

Work with Trusts to identify suitable Ambulance Handover areas within or near Emergency Departments to maximise Ambulance Capacity

Timely Hospital Discharge

Timely transport to support Trusts with discharges to maintain flow within hospitals.

Key Enablers

Protecting and Promoting Staff Health and Wellbeing

Develop Maximising Attendance Plan
Support crews outside Emergency Departments for prolonged periods
Develop plans to reduce late finishes.

Surge Preparation (REAP)

Utilise Existing Clinical Safety Plan.
Utilise our 7-day forecasting tool REAP.
When necessary, utilise Private Ambulance Sector

Preparation for industrial action

Replicate command and control structures in preparation for any further action.
Maintain working relationships with TU colleagues.
Utilise Trusts' BCP

Monitoring and Reporting

Utilise the Trusts' existing reporting and monitoring structures.
Fulfil requirements as part of the Regional Control Centre