

## FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



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Dear *Carolyn,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 29 December 2020 in which you advised of the motion passed by Belfast City Council in relation to the care provided by hospices and hospice staff and the Council's call for fair and transparent funding in line with demand and continued high quality palliative and end of life care.

Hospices in Northern Ireland provide a valued service in caring for and supporting people living with palliative and end of life care needs and those who are important to them. Department of Health officials and their colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) work closely with hospices and are aware of both the contribution they make and the challenges they face.

I recognise the financial pressure facing hospices. Unfortunately COVID-19 has impacted across the voluntary and community sector and there are similar issues across other areas and organisations also where there are increasing demands for services and financial pressures arising from this.

The Health and Social Care Board has Service Level Agreements in place with each of the hospice providers in Northern Ireland for both inpatient and community based services. Separate arrangements are also in place with HSC Trusts for hospice nurse night sitting services as required. In addition, Marie Curie also provides a regional out of hours Rapid Response Service.

Funding guidance put in place by the Department in 2004 introduced 50/50 funding for agreed adult inpatient hospice services with effect from 2004/05 and 50% funding for agreed adult community services with effect from 2005/06. These arrangements provide for funding of agreed commissioned services, not a hospice's total running costs.

Children's hospice services are funded differently to adult services and separate commissioning and funding arrangements are in place for children's palliative care and hospice services.

In addition to core funding for children's services, following the closure of the Horizon West children's hospice, my Department agreed to fund an additional bed at the NI Children's Hospice at Horizon House for 3 years from 2018/19 on a 50:50 basis.

Since 2018, a Paediatric and Life Limited Service (PALLs) has also been commissioned from the NI Children's Hospice. The service provides a specialist nursing role to support children, families and clinicians in recognising and managing end of life needs as well as access to a dedicated bed in the NI Children's Hospice or in the child's own home. The funding of £186,000 for the PALLS service was made available initially through Confidence and Supply transformation funding. My Department has made this funding available for a further year in 2020/21 to ensure the continued delivery of the service by the NI Children's hospice.

In recognition of challenges faced by hospices during the ongoing pandemic, with the agreement of my Department, the HSCB put arrangements in place to support hospices' cash flow. These arrangements also apply to contracts between the hospices and Health and Social Care Trusts. The Health and Social Care Board has also worked closely with hospices to support the availability of PPE, fit testing and access to sanitising equipment and to keep hospices informed about the broader system approach to responding to COVID-19.

I also welcome the additional funding that has been made available to hospices in recognition of the restrictions on fundraising opportunities and retail as a result of COVID-19. In May 2020, £6.75 million was allocated to local hospices and the Cancer Fund for Children (CFC). On 29 October, further additional funding of £7.3million for hospices and the Cancer Fund for Children was announced and has since been allocated to hospices.

The HSCB has recently completed a review of adult hospice funding, as a result of which a total funding shortfall of £867,360 was identified between the 2019/20 funding provided to hospices when compared against benchmarked costs assessed as part of the review process. This additional funding has been made available to hospices backdated to April 2019.

In October 2020, the Health and Social Care Board approved a 4% uplift for 2020/21 to the value of its core contract Service Level Agreements held with hospices in Northern Ireland.

The current funding arrangements for adult hospices date back to 2004. I believe it is appropriate therefore that consideration be given to reviewing these in light of the changing context and demographics for palliative care and I hope that hospices would engage with this.

New Decade New Approach (NDNA) included a commitment to increase investment in palliative and end of life care to fully implement service improvements for palliative and end of life care including enhancing the contribution of hospices; and to increase support for palliative perinatal care. Investment to meet the NDNA palliative care commitment has been captured in my Department's bids for additional funding in the Department of Finance Budget 2021-22 Exercise.

I trust this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely



**Robin Swann MLA**  
**Minister of Health**