

Consultation Response:

Department of Health's
Equality Impact
Assessment on the
2024-25 Budget

August 2024



We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department of Health's Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the 2024/25 Northern Ireland Budget. As the leading organisation within Northern Ireland supporting individuals impacted by sexual abuse and abusive relationships, our mission is to enable positive change for those impacted by sexual abuse and abusive relationships through supporting, informing, and influencing society.

The 2024/25 Budget reflects severe pressures on the Department of Health to maintain services, and as a charity that receives funding support from the Department, we are concerned that the budgetary decisions will result in further cuts to the community and voluntary sector, which is already under immense pressure to deliver vital services to the community on a shoestring budget. In the Equality Impact Assessment, the Department notes that the 50% cut to the Core Grant Scheme will not be reversed, and Point 14 of the Equality Impact Assessment lays out some of the measures that could be implemented to balance the budget, including "Cease Core Grant Funding completely in 2024/25" and "Reduction in payments for support services provided by the Community and Voluntary Sector". The Equality and Impact Assessment notes that, if funding for the Core Grant Scheme was withdrawn entirely, it will reduce available funding for organisations who support older people, children, people in the LGBT community, people with disabilities and people with dependants, and that a reduction in payments to the community and voluntary sector will affect older people, younger people, looked-after children, and people living with a disability.

We have already seen the effects of these kinds of proposals on the voluntary and community sector- the Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) regional organisation found that services such as drug and alcohol programmes, child development programmes, parent support groups, and street-based services were all unable to continue their operations; Disability Action was unable to provide their front-line

information and advice services; Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland became the only Federation in the UK and Ireland to not be in receipt of state funding. This is only the tip of the iceberg, with pressures to deliver front-line services falling upon the community and voluntary sector without the ability to recruit, train, and retain staff and ensure quality assurance.

In terms of the effects of the Budget on Nexus, we provide a range of therapeutic interventions to meet needs of individuals who have been impacted by sexual abuse and abusive relationships from age 8 and up. Nexus also offers post-counselling group support through our aftercare service, RESET, and we host the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline, available 24/7. Our services rely on funding from various schemes such as Core Grant Funding, HSC Trusts and wider Departmental budget allocations, and we are seeing the demand for our services continue to grow without any further investment to provide these services, and simultaneously Department of Health funding for specialist counselling services to people impacted by sexual abuse was set to be discontinued in Spring 2024. At the time of the funding announcement, there were more than 800 people on the waitlist for counselling at Nexus who would have been adversely affected by the funding cuts. We were grateful to the MLA's and public who supported us during this time, and we welcomed the Departments' announcement of a further year's extension to our contract.

Until 2022-23 Nexus received approximately 3% of our annual funding through the Core Grant scheme. Since 2022-23 this has reduced to 1.5% and as a result has negatively impacted the amount of strategic work the organisation can undertake, such as submitting consultation responses and contributing to policy and service commissioning reviews, all of which support local government to improve its work and the interventions it offers.

Regarding the proposal to reduce payments for support services, this would negatively affect our ability to deliver counselling sessions: in the context of the 1-year contract extension and renegotiation of contract to uplift payment per session, if the adult sexual abuse counselling service doesn't go out to tender process for the 2025/26 year, and or it remains with Nexus but at a lower session rate, we would not be able to deliver contract to as many people as we are now. For context, in 2023, the PSNI released their annual crime statistics, recording that the number of sexual offences reported in Northern Ireland during the 2022/23 year were the highest on record, and for 2022/23 and 2023/24 Nexus received approximately 175 new referrals every month; considering this information, we acknowledge that statistics can only provide a snapshot of the adverse impact of sexual abuse.

The Department of Health's EQIA briefly mentions the impact of Core Grant Funding and sector payment cuts to charities and community and voluntary services, however we have compiled the following research on scope and scale of sexual abuse across Section 75 demographics to further contextualise the importance of investing in the community and voluntary sector:

Race

- National Assembly Against Racism - Despite making up less than 10% of the population of the UK, more than 20% of sexual assault victims come from BME groups.
- Children's Commissioner Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment - black and minority ethnic children may be underrepresented in child protection referrals and may not access, or receive a poorer quality of, support.
- Prison Reform Trust - Minoritised women from particular communities are more likely to be criminalised, viewed as complicit in violence towards them and thus less likely to be considered 'victims' of sexual violence. They are also subject to harsher sentencing with less access to specialist support.

Age

- [NSPCC Child Sexual Abuse Briefing](#) - 1 in 20 children have been sexually abused.
- [NPSCC Child Sexual Abuse Briefing](#) - Concerns around sexual abuse have been identified for over 2,400 children in the UK who are the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register.
- [NewsLetter Article](#) - NSPCC saw a record number of sexual offences against children recorded by the PSNI.
- [Hourglass](#) - While sexual abuse is the least common abuse type that Hourglass sees, since 2019, Hourglass' Helpline has seen an increase year on year in the number of cases where sexual abuse is mentioned.
- [Scottish Transgender Alliance Out of Sight, Out of Mind Report](#) - 80% of respondents stated that they had experienced emotionally, sexually, or physically abusive behaviour by a partner or ex-partner.
- [Rape Crisis England and Wales](#) - 1 in 18 men have been raped or sexually assaulted as an adult.
- [Official for National Statistics](#) - More than 1 in 4 women have been raped or sexually assaulted as an adult.
- [Ulster University Report 'Every Voice Matters!'](#) - 98% of women in Northern Ireland have experienced at least one form of violence or abuse in their lifetime, with half (50%) experiencing this before they were 11 years old.
- [Queen's University Belfast Report 'It's Just What Happens'](#) - Over one-third (37%) of survey respondents (women and girls aged 12-17 years) reported having experienced one form of violence and another 36% had experienced more than one.

Sexuality

- [Galop UK Navigating the Criminal Justice System & Support Services](#) - Only 12% of LGBTQ+ sexual violence survivors had reported their most significant experience of sexual violence.

- Galop UK LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Survivor's Access to Support Report - Compared with those in the major queer cities (37%), LGBT+ survivors living in a village (54%) or any other city (50%) at the time of the abuse were more likely to report they did not know any supports were available.
- Stonewall Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Check - One in fourteen Lesbian and Bisexual Women say they had been forced to have unwanted sex.
- Stonewall Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey - One in eleven (nine per cent) gay and bisexual men have been forced by a male partner to have unwanted sex.

Disability

- Stop It Now - Children with a disability are more likely to be sexually abused than children who do not have a disability.
- Ann Craft Trust - The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that in the three years ending March 2018, 3.7% of disabled adults aged 16 to 59 years reported experiencing any sexual assault in the last year in England and Wales, compared with 1.9% of non-disabled adults. In the same period, disabled women were almost twice as likely to have experienced a sexual assault in the last year, at 5.7% compared to 3.0% for non-disabled women.

This research indicates that discontinuing the Core Grant Funding Scheme and further cuts to payments to the Community and Voluntary Sector will affect several Section 75 Groups who are disproportionately impacted by sexual abuse and abusive relationships.

We call on the Department of Health to critically examine their Equality Impact Assessment to inform their decision making by centring the most vulnerable in our society and ensuring that vital services in the community and voluntary sector are protected and adequately funded.

Further Information



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