



HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE INNOVATION GRANT SCHEME – Consultation

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed Health & Social Care Innovation Grant Scheme on behalf of our 9 local Women's Aid groups.

Innovation and core funding

We generally agree that *“against a backdrop of increasing pressure on the health and social care budget and system, it is important that we continually seek to improve how we meet the health and social care needs of the people of Northern Ireland.”* However, we are not convinced that the proposals outlined within this consultation document will deliver on this aim. While supporting innovation is a positive step, it is not a replacement for tried and tested evidence-based service delivery and solutions. For an innovation scheme such as this to deliver on the aim of an improved health and social care service for all, it must operate in the context of adequately funded core services. It should also be borne in mind that new ideas do not automatically equate to better services or outcomes or represent the best use of public money, particularly if those new ideas do not work or cannot be integrated more permanently into health and social care service provision due to lack of long-term funding.

Innovation is already taking place on a regular basis within the context of work carried out by established expert service providers. Women's Aid has supported women and their children who are affected by domestic violence for 40 years. We have continued to evolve our service provision based on the views and needs of our service users, evidenced best practice in the field of domestic and sexual violence, and the need to address emerging issues. In this way we are innovative. However, we also carry out work which has been in place for many years, such as refuge and outreach support, or advocacy and awareness-raising on behalf of victims of domestic abuse. These services may not be new ideas, nor are they time-limited projects that will promise to eradicate domestic and sexual violence within a 3-year project cycle. They are however vital services that are proactively leading to better policy, support and outcomes for those affected by domestic and sexual violence. It is this support and funding provided by government to expert organisations like Women's Aid which allows us to continue to innovate within the context of established, tried and tested service provision.

Sustainability

The consultation document states that *“the VCSE sectors are well placed to develop innovative and cost effective solutions.”* Women's Aid would point out that the VCSE sectors are already developing and delivering innovative and cost-effective solutions in the field of health. Our ability to do this depends on being adequately funded to continue to sustain our work and our organisations. The voluntary sector is facing a rapidly changing funding environment, and while we are fully committed to working in partnership with government, this requires both project funding and core funding to deliver the best services and health outcomes for those affected by domestic and sexual violence. We would also point out that it also requires funding for successful innovation projects to become integrated into healthcare on a more permanent basis.

Project funding for innovative projects is also already available through charitable funders like Big Lottery, Children in Need and Comic Relief. Women's Aid has been consistently funded to carry out innovative work by such funding bodies thanks to the fact that we are funded by government and recognised by government as the leading agency tackling domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland. Without core funding support, our ability to acquire such funding will be diminished, as will our ability to work with government to deliver on the aims and outcomes of the DSVS Strategy.

Finally, we would question why an innovation scheme has been proposed without funding for the final step to allow successful initiatives to be integrated into mainstream health and social care provision. This limits the effectiveness of the scheme to make a real and transformative difference to health and wellbeing outcomes for people in Northern Ireland.

Expertise in decision-making panels

If the innovation scheme is to run along the lines proposed in the document, it is vital that the panels making decisions on which projects are funded include experts in the field in question. This is essential to ensure that money is being spent effectively and funding is being given to projects and organisations which understand the gaps and challenges, and potential solutions, in the requisite area of health.

For further information about this response please contact:

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*Open to **all women and men** affected by domestic & sexual violence*