



## ***Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement***

### ***Opening Statement by Damien McCallion, Director General, Cooperation and Working Together***

#### **Introduction**

Thank you to the Chair and Committee members for the invitation to address you today. The purpose of this submission is to brief members on the operation of the Cooperation and Working Together Partnership (CAWT). I am joined by my colleagues Mr Neil Guckian, Chief Executive, Western Health and Social Care Trust and Mr Bill Forbes, Chief Officer, CAWT.

This opening statement describes CAWT's cross border working arrangements and outlines health and social care services currently supported by CAWT through various initiatives.

#### **Context**

Founded in 1992 with the signing of the Ballyconnell Agreement, the CAWT Partnership is a unique structure providing an overarching framework for the planning, management and implementation of cross border health and social care. The core purpose of CAWT is to support its partner organisations in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in their collective work to improve the health and wellbeing of the people living in the border region and to enable better access to health and social care services. CAWT does not in itself deliver services.

In Northern Ireland, the CAWT partners are the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust and the Western Health and Social Care Trust. In the Republic of Ireland, the Partnership comprises the border counties of the Health Service Executive (HSE).

North-South co-operation underpins all of CAWT's cross border health and social care activity which is driven by the needs of the region and the health priorities of all of the key partners, focusing on supporting the needs of people along the border corridor. A key responsibility of the CAWT Partnership is the provision

of co-ordinated and strategic oversight ensuring work undertaken complements national Government and Health Department priorities in both jurisdictions.

Significant EU grant funding totalling €31.1m, under the current INTERREG VA Programme, has enabled the CAWT partnership to demonstrate how investment in cross border health and social care services improves access to health services and enhances care, particularly for people living in rural or remote areas. The INTERREG VA Programme is the fourth EU funding stream that the CAWT Partnership has successfully implemented projects to support the needs of local people on the border corridor.

Indeed, preparatory work is underway in reaching a state of preparedness for CAWT's application to the PEACE PLUS EU cross border programme, the Special EU Programme Body's new funding measure which builds upon previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes.

As you may be aware, the new PEACEPLUS Programme (2021-2027) is set to launch later this year. Under the six themes of the PEACEPLUS Programme there will be up to 22 separate investment areas.

Please note, that the Programme has not yet been approved by the European Commission, although it has been approved by the NI Executive, the Government of Ireland and the North South Ministerial Council.

Equally important of course is the commitment of the Health Services North and South to work in a collaborative way where a joined-up approach to service developments can bring mutual advantages.

### **Current Cross Border Projects**

Five projects, funded under the EU INTERREG VA Health Theme, are currently underway; four led by CAWT and one led by NHS National Services Scotland. These include:

- Acute Hospitals Services Project: improving accessibility through the development of acute hospital services pathways;
- Community Health Synchronisation 'CoH-Sync' Project: tackling health inequalities and improving population health through prevention and early intervention;
- Innovation Recovery Project: establishing a cross border Mental Health Recovery College Network which builds resilience and recovery within people and communities; and

- Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences 'MACE': transforming the lives of vulnerable children and families through early intervention and support; and
- mPower Project: supporting older people in managing their health and wellbeing more effectively in their community.

In addition, the CAWT Partnership facilitates other non EU funded cross border/North South activity including all-Island Emergency Planning, including joint academic learning and the delivery of Humanitarian Disaster Assistance training. In November 2021 a very successful cross border humanitarian disaster planning course, hosted by the United Nations Training School in the Curragh, shared experiences and learning, from a range of military and health contributors, on the Irish/British response to Covid-19.

CAWT plays a key role in the facilitation of North South health and social care co-operation supporting initiatives commissioned directly by the Departments of Health. This work has resulted in major developments such as the Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) at Altnagelvin Hospital which has been treating patients from Donegal since May 2016 and the North West Cancer Centre at Altnagelvin (Western Health and Social Care Trust), which provides Radiotherapy services to patients from Donegal, again since 2016.

### **Looking to the Future**

Throughout 2019, 2020 and 2021 both the NI and RoI Departments of Health engaged in the preparations for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. In 2018 both Governments' agreement to underwrite the INTERREG VA EU funding allocations was welcomed by all CAWT partners. As a result of these assurances, despite the uncertainty surrounding EU Exit arrangements, the CAWT Partnership remains cautiously optimistic that post-Brexit arrangements will not obstruct existing cross border and all-island health and social care service provision or limit future service developments.

Historically, when obstacles to the development of cross border services were identified, many practical solutions have been developed by the CAWT Partnership. For example, a cross border indemnity agreement allows health and social care employees to work in both jurisdictions within a range of contexts described within the agreement. In relation to emergency planning, professional and regulatory bodies agreed for their registrants/members to provide services in the opposite jurisdiction in the event of a major incident whilst remaining accountable to them.

In order to maintain and further develop the solid working relationships which are now an everyday experience in the health services North and South, CAWT remains committed to its focus on key strategic goals including:

- Achieving solutions to barriers to the cross border mobility of patients and professionals;
- Actively pursuing collaborative strategic alliances;
- Actively engaging with policy makers and other key stakeholders in relation to the development and direction of cross border health and social care; and
- Embedding cross border planning and implementation in core activities where there is mutual benefit to be gained in terms of service efficiency and effectiveness.

In conclusion, despite the uncertainty presented in recent years we continue to work collaboratively to improve the lives of people living in the border areas.

## **APPENDIX - CAWT Programme Report**

### **Current EU Projects**

Our Acute Hospital Services Project demonstrates how cross border co-operation can improve service accessibility and patient flows enabling more efficient access to assessment, diagnostics and treatment. These EU funded acute services create additional capacity within traditional hospital services bringing benefits to both the patients and the health services across jurisdictions. This contributes to the reform and modernisation of acute hospital care which remains a key priority in the transformation of services for the Departments of Health in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Community Paramedic Service enhances the health and social care of citizens living in more rural and isolated areas. From a service perspective the project helps effect the transition from traditional institution-based service provision to a more community-based approach.

The CAWT CoH-Sync Project tackles health inequalities improving population health through prevention and early intervention. CoH-Sync Health Facilitators are working in communities providing people with personalised Health and Wellbeing Plans and support with accessing community-based health interventions. The CoH-Sync project demonstrates how added value is gained from building effective partnerships between statutory services and our community and voluntary sector partners in both jurisdictions.

The cross border Mental Health Recovery College Network is now active in 12 counties across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and supports people in their recovery from mental health difficulties. The project highlights the valuable role of co-production in mental health service development. People with experience of mental health services are working alongside mental health practitioners to develop and co-deliver training and support in mental wellbeing and personal resilience.

The MACE Project supports families, who are at risk from multiple adversities in their lives, through raising awareness about childhood trauma and adversity and by providing nurturing support within communities. A range of workshops and awareness raising sessions in relation to multiple adverse childhood experiences, trauma informed practice and coercive control has been delivered. The MACE Project also facilitates Trauma Informed Cross Border Networks of Excellence and training needs analysis working groups in the border region.

The mPower Project, led by our partners in NHS National Services Scotland, is well established within communities enabling people aged 65+years to live well and independently in their own homes. Through the innovative use of personalised wellbeing plans and technology people are enabled to access better support for managing their Long Term Conditions and improve their health and wellbeing.

### **CAWT's Covid Contribution**

Over past months the outbreak of Covid-19 presented our communities and our health and social care services with their greatest challenge for generations. Through collaboration and innovation CAWT stepped up, through its projects, to support health and social care partners meet the needs of border citizens in an increasingly challenging and restrictive environment.

In direct response to the pandemic, CAWT project staff adapted and redesigned services through partnership working and creative use of technology. For example, the Innovation Recovery team developed an online programme of courses maintaining connectedness to ensure that, in a worrying and isolating time, support through the delivery of mental health support programmes is freely available.

The Community Health Synchronisation Project, with six hubs in the border counties, is well positioned to support community responses to Covid-19. Staff worked alongside community groups and health services delivering food and medicines to people in self-isolation. CoH-Sync Hubs developed Covid-related information providing updates, signposting to local support and designing bespoke resources such as isolation packs. Telephone support included friendly calls, reinforcement of safety messages and providing a listening ear.

**Contacts:**

Damien McCallion

Director General CAWT & HSE National Director Emergency Management

The Bungalow, Saint John's Community Hospital, Sligo

Tel: 00353 71 914 8816

Email: [damien.mccallion@hse.ie](mailto:damien.mccallion@hse.ie)

Neil Guckian

Chief Executive Western Health and Social Care Trust

Altnagelvin Hospital, Derry, BT476SB

Tel: +44 (0)28 71 611335

Email: [Neil.Guckian@westerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:Neil.Guckian@westerntrust.hscni.net)

Bill Forbes

CAWT Chief Officer

CAWT Development Centre, Riverview House, Abercorn Road, Derry, BT48 6SB

Tel: +44 (0)28 7127 2100

Email: [bill.forbes@hse.ie](mailto:bill.forbes@hse.ie)



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