

Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Health

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Consultation on the Regional Review of Neurology Services – Final Report

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Regional Review of Neurology Services – Final Report

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The overarching vision set out in the final report of the Neurology Review is that future neurology services are person centred, joined-up, responsive, evidence-based and resourced to meet the needs of people with neurological conditions in NI. The final report identifies four priority areas with 30 associated recommendations to support the achievement of that vision.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

It is intended that the implementation of the recommendations proposed in the final report of the Neurology Review, subject to funding, will deliver improvements to neurology services for all people with a neurological condition compared to current service provision. These improvements will be driven by the implementation of a person-centred approach; significant growth of the neurology workforce including the development of advanced roles and training in neurology for non-neurology specialists; increased access to neurology inpatient beds at the regional neurosciences centre; the development of local neurology teams focused on rehabilitation; and the development of condition specific pathways. It is envisaged that this will generate improvements which will benefit all people with a neurological condition across Northern Ireland in both rural areas and urban areas.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The Review's analysis identifies significant shortfalls in current Neurology services. This includes the availability of some services in certain Trusts but not others and the absence of local community-facing services across Trusts. For people living in a rural area, these shortcomings may be exacerbated by, for example, a need to travel further to access care or the need to manage their condition without the support that best practice guidance would recommend.

In the context of the Review's recommendations to address these shortcomings, it may be the case that some rural areas benefit to a greater degree than those in some urban areas.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

The voice of people with neurological conditions from across NI throughout the Review has been facilitated through engagement with the NI Neurological Charities Alliance from the outset. In addition, direct pre-engagement with people with neurological conditions and their carers on the final report of the Review was secured through the Patient Client Council Neurology Engagement Project.

Census 2021 – ([Results | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#))

DAERA publication – Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2022 (referencing NISRA midyear population estimates 2020, Travel Survey NI 2017-19)

Ark. (2022). Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: Insights into transport access and vehicle ownership. ([NILT](#))

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

The final report was subject to pre-engagement with people with neurological conditions. This was facilitated by the Patient Client Council who recruited participants from across NI. Participants were asked to consider whether the report's analysis identified the right areas for improvement based on personal experience and if the report's recommendations would address these problems. Participants agreed with both the analysis and the recommendations; no issues specific to rural areas were raised.

According to NISRA's 2020 mid-year estimates of population, more than a third (36%) of Northern Ireland's (NI) population lives in a rural area. Despite similarities in many aspects of urban and rural life, there are also challenges which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas outside of Belfast. Difficulties with access to services, and issues with connectivity, social and digital, tend to have a disproportionate impact on rural dwellers. The frequency of public transport services differs greatly between urban and rural areas. Approximately 20% of rural residents find public transport, hinders their ability to access services and employment.

If the response to Section 3A was **YES** GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Implementation of the recommendations proposed in the final report of the Review are intended to drive improvements in neurology services and generate a positive impact for all people with a neurological condition in NI regardless of their condition or geographical location.

These measures include a regional approach to the Consultant workforce, the establishment of Local Neurology Teams in each Trust area, the development of general neurology clinics in each Trust area and measures to ensure that patients admitted to hospital as a neurological emergency have access to timely assessment from a Neurologist.

In this context, the implementation of the report's recommendations may have a positive differential impact on people living in rural areas by addressing inequities and promoting local service development.

The Department will review the responses to the planned consultation exercise and consider any social and economic needs of people in rural areas identified as a result of that exercise.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes No If the response is **NO GO TO Section 5C.**

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The Review has conducted a broad programme of analysis of current services and user experience. This analysis has informed the development proposed recommendations to improve services as set out in the final report of the Review. A Gaps and Constraints analysis of current services highlighted shortfalls in the availability of particular services across Trusts; challenges in terms of the coordination of care; and the importance of clear pathways. An assessment of inpatient and outpatient services highlighted a significant gap between demand and the capacity in the system; and inequity for people in some geographical locations in terms of access to specialist neurological opinion and admission to inpatient beds at the Regional Neurosciences Centre.

In the context of these issues, the recommendations proposed in the final report of the Review such as the introduction of referral management systems for outpatient referrals; an increase in inpatient bed provision at the regional neurosciences centre, the development of Specialist Neurology Clinics in each Trust area and the implementation of Local Neurology Teams with a focus on rehabilitation and symptom management are all intended to generate improvements for people with neurological conditions across NI. It is intended that these recommendations will be underpinned by the growth and development of the neurology workforce.

The improvements to services that the proposed recommendations will deliver are intended to address these inequalities and promote equitable access for both rural and urban communities.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

N/A

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Andrew Miller
Position/Grade:	Staff Officer
Division/Branch	Regional Health Services Transformation Directorate
Signature:	<i>Andrew Miller</i>
Date:	21/03/2025
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Dean Looney
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Regional Health Services Transformation Directorate
Signature:	<i>Dean Looney</i>
Date:	09/04/2025