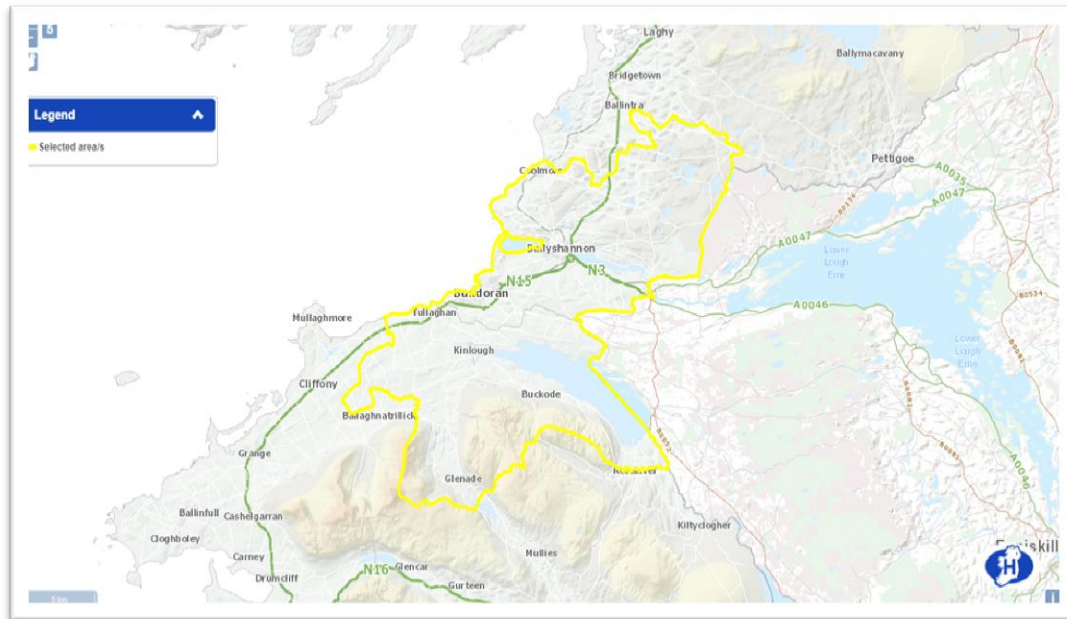


## 4.5 Ballyshannon – Bundoran Primary Care Team Area Profile

### 1. Background

Ballyshannon - Bundoran Primary Care Team area is located to the south of the Donegal County stretching from Laghey to the north and covering the towns of Ballyshannon and Bundoran. It stretches down as far as Tullaghan and borders the counties of Leitrim and Fermanagh to the east and south.

**Figure. 1: Ballyshannon- Bundoran PCT area**



The Ballyshannon/- Bundoran Primary Care Team was established In 2007 and worked quite effectively up until recently. It has administration support but had a HSE Facilitator which helped drive the process. It met monthly and members included Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Public Health Nurses, Dietician (attended occasionally) and Community Health Forum representatives.

A Community Health Forum is well established in the area and meets monthly. The PCT and CHF have worked well together over the years and undertaken a number of joint and individual projects including:

- Annual public health screenings and information dissemination at marts, supermarkets, football matches, agricultural shows and other events
- Cookery demonstrations around healthy eating
- Mental health awareness (fridge magnets with information about where to go for help)
- Paediatric first aid training
- Support for a youth 'Be Healthy, Be Happy' Programme run by Foroige
- Parenting courses
- Stress Control workshops and training

The area is served by Bus Eireann and Expressway services as well as a number of private bus companies linking the main urban centres. The Local Link service runs a number of routes from

Ballyshannon to Donegal Town, Sligo to Rosstown, Kinlough via Bundoran to Ballyshannon and Sligo to Bundoran.

## 2. Overview of Area<sup>1</sup>

Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT is unusual in that it borders a number of other counties in the Republic, adjacent to Leitrim to the south and also borders counties in Northern Ireland. The area naturally looks towards Sligo (which is a half-hour drive away), for secondary services, as it is closer than Letterkenny. It shares a natural hinterland with the county of Fermanagh. Both Ballyshannon and Bundoran are the largest towns in the area and are separated by 10km along the main N15 road into Donegal from Sligo.

Ballyshannon has a newly acquired Primary Care Centre housing HSE administration staff along with Primary Care services including GPs, PHNs, facilities for physiotherapy, chiropody, occupational therapy, dental treatment, ophthalmology, speech and language therapy, orthopaedics and X-ray, as well as some other specialist services.

Bundoran is probably better known for its tourism industry and is well-resourced with gym, swimming and leisure facilities. A new community centre was recently opened providing a much needed facility for the area.

The following services are available in the PCT area:

- 7 primary schools
- 2 post primary schools
- 2 libraries
- 1 day centres
- 2 health centres
- 3 public health nurses
- 1 Public Services Outreach Centre
- No Social Prescribing Project
- No MABS (Donegal Town nearest)
- 2 Fire Stations (Fire service management in Co. Donegal have recommended the amalgamation of fire services at Ballyshannon and Bundoran, and the closure of the fire station at Ballyshannon)
- Ambulance Control Centre and First Responders Group
- 2 arts centre/ theatre
- 2 Community Centres
- 1 Leisure Centre
- 1 community hospitals
- 1 Mens Shed
- 2 garda stations

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<sup>1</sup> The statistical data in the section is drawn primarily from the Area Profiles developed by the HSE Public Health Department using Census 2016 data and other relevant health data sources.

## **Population Structure**

There are 10,031 people living in the Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT area. The proportion of people in the 0-4 age category has decreased significantly by 16%, since 2011. This is a significant drop, and while similar to the County figure, it is much higher than the national figure of 7%. Unlike other areas, Ballyshannon/ Bundoran has not experienced the steep decline in the age group between 20 and 34. While there is a decrease, the highest being in the 30 – 34 age group at 21% (and still higher than the national figures), it is not as severe as in other PCT areas where population decreases are felt by anything up to 35%. This still reflects a significant shift in this particular age cohort resulting in a loss of part of the working age/ reproducing generation.

Population increases are recorded in the 65+ age group with a 23% increase in the 70 – 74 age group. A total of 17% of the population are aged 65 and over and the majority of people in the older age categories are women.

Population projections until the year 2025 show that the area will experience 3% rise in population with the majority of changes occurring in the older age group. It is expected that the 0 – 9 year old age group will decrease by 18% and will account for 17% of the population by 2025. The 20 – 29 age group is projected to increase, as much as 49% in the 20 – 24 age bracket alone, but the numbers of people in the 30 – 44 age bracket will decline in the same time period. The greatest increases are predicted for the older population (65+) where the number of people in the 75 – 79 age group and the 80 – 84 age group will effectively double. This means that 21% of the population will be aged 65+ (one in five) by 2025.

## **Age Dependency**

The age dependent population (0-14 and 65+ age group as a percentage of 15 – 64 year olds) is 61%, which is in line with County figures and higher than the national figure. The young dependent population is 33% which is lower than the County and CHO 1 average but the older dependent population is higher than the other averages at 28% due to the significant numbers of older people in the area. A high age dependency ratio has implications for service provision in the area i.e. more people dependent on public services.

## **Nationality & Ethnicity**

Eleven per cent of the population in the Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT area identifies with a nationality other than Irish. This can be broken down across the UK (3%), Polish (2%) and other nationalities (2.4%). Visitors to the area accounted for 4%.

There are a significant number of Travellers living in the area; 82 in total which accounts for 0.8% of the population. This is higher than County average figure of 0.4% and CHO 1 figure of 0.5%.

## **Socio-Economic Profile**

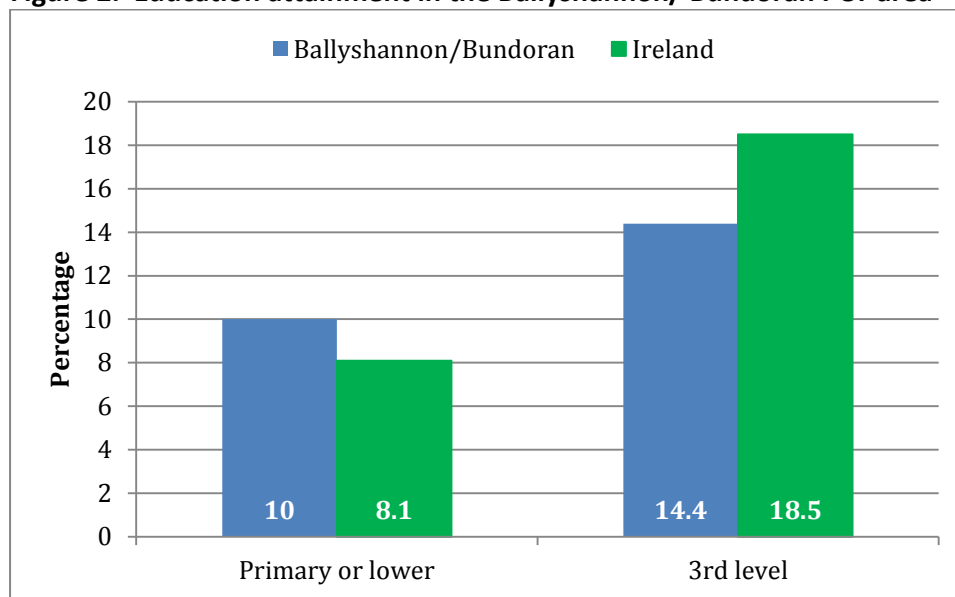
The area has a lower proportion than other areas of people falling into the semi skilled/ unskilled work category (15%) and conversely has 5% of people falling into professional category which is higher than some of the other PCT areas.

## Educational Attainment

One in ten people (10%) in Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT area have been educated to primary level only. This compares favourably with other PCT areas where the rate of educational attainment is poorer. In fact, this PCT area (after Letterkenny) records the smallest proportion of people leaving school with primary education only across the County and across CHO 1 area.

The positive picture continues with regard to third level educational attainment. Fourteen percent of the population have a third level qualification and this is in line with County and CHO 1 figures, although lower than the national figure of 18.5%.

**Figure 2. Education attainment in the Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT area**



## Unemployment

The unemployment rate has fallen significantly since 2011 showing that 7% of the population in Ballyshannon/ Bundoran was unemployed in 2016, in line with County and CHO 1 figures. It is difficult to know however whether there actually are more people at work or whether it is the result of the migration/ emigration of the working age cohort, a reflection of the shift into retirement or uptake of labour market schemes which takes people out of unemployment statistics. It is likely that it is a combination of all of these factors.

## Occupations

The total number of people at work in the Ballyshannon-Bundoran PCT area in 2016 was 1,541 accounting for 54% male and 46% female. The greatest numbers work in Professional Services, Commerce and Trade and Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (outside of the 'Other' category).

Industry	Total	Male	Female
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	214	196	18
Building & Construction	79	72	*
Manufacturing Industries	207	130	77
Commerce and Trade	255	133	122
Transport & Communication	59	44	15
Public Administration	86	32	54
Professional Services	343	85	258
Other	298	146	152

Note: \* As the number of women working in Building and Construction in the Ballyshannon-Bundoran PCT area is 10 or less, this has not been reported above to protect privacy and confidentiality.

## Family Structure

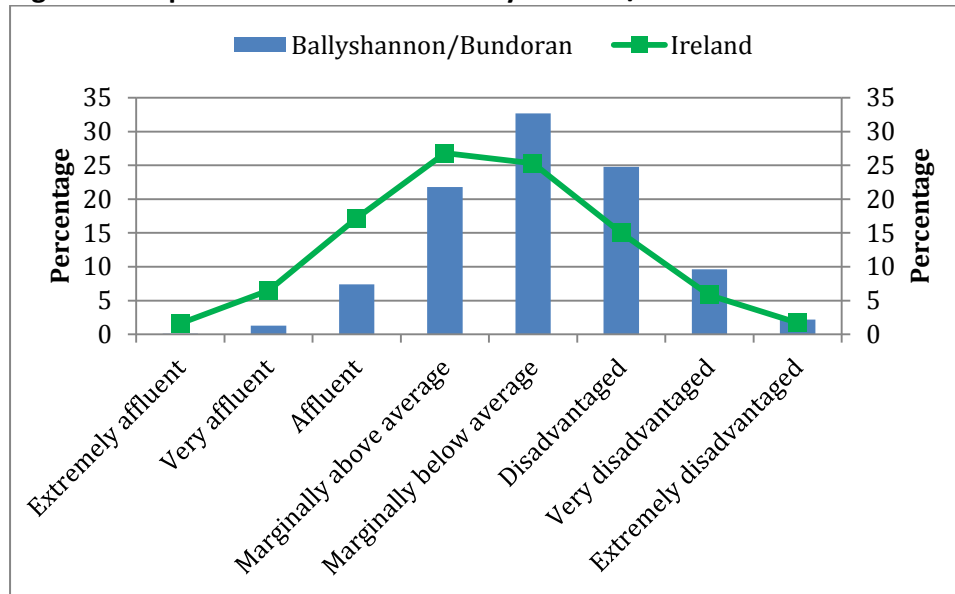
There are 2,415 families in the Ballyshannon/ Bundoran area with a relatively high proportion of people categorized as 'empty nesters' (14%), and 'retired' (12%), higher than the County and national averages. There are slightly lower levels of the pre-school (8%) and early school ages (10%) with pre-adolescent and adolescent families in line with County and national averages at 11% and 14% respectively.

Looking at the type of families in the area, 19% are one parent families which means that one in every five families with children is headed by one parent. This is the highest rate across all PCTs (along with the Lagan Valley PCT area) and the majority are headed by single mothers.

## Deprivation

Just over a third of the population (37%) in Ballyshannon/ Bundoran is classed as 'disadvantaged', 'very disadvantaged' and 'extremely disadvantaged'. This is just below the County figure of 38.6% and well above the national figure of 22.5%. Nearly 12% of the population is considered either 'very' or 'extremely disadvantaged'.

**Figure 3. Deprivation Levels in the Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT area**



### Health Indicators

One hundred and eighty two people (2% of the population) rate their health as either ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ which is line with County and CHO 1 figures (2%) but a little higher than the national figure of 1.6%. The proportion of carers in the area (5%) is slightly higher than County and national averages, and there are 1,549 people with disabilities in the area (15%), again slightly higher than the County figure of 14.4% and the national figure of 13.5%.

### Connectivity

A significant proportion of the population (13%) do not own a car which is one of the highest among the PCT areas posing questions about other available transport options. Over one in four people (27%) do not have internet access which again is one of the highest across PCT areas and higher than County (25%) or national averages (18%). Just 60% of the population has access to broadband which is lower than the County and national averages.

## 3. Consultation Findings

### Overview

This section presents the findings arising from one consultation meeting held with Ballyshannon/ Bundoran CHF (4 participants) and one consultation meeting held with the Primary Care Team (4 participants). The online survey was also issued to PCT members and received 4 responses. It also incorporates the findings of the consultation meetings held as part of the Healthy Ireland Community Engagement process where meetings were held across the 5 Municipal Districts (MD - the Donegal Municipal District most relevant here) on health and wellbeing issues in Donegal.

It is important to note that this section directly reflects the views of the people who attended the focus groups, and has not been filtered in any way. Where possible fact checking has taken place, but there is the possibility that some feedback reflect personal viewpoints which may or

may not be wholly accurate. However, people's perceptions reflect their own reality so if views are considered 'inaccurate' then this can present as a communication issue that needs to be addressed.

## **Access**

Transport. The lack of transport options away from the main routes and connections between services make it difficult to get to appointments. The NowDoc service for the area is located in Mountcharles (just outside Donegal Town and 30km from Ballyshannon and 36 km from Bundoran), and people who do not have transport cannot get there. It is very unusual for doctors to come to the house although with some GPs there seems to be a little more flexibility, and a GP will sometimes meet closer to home. Taxis that can accommodate people with disabilities are in short supply, are expensive and often don't turn up on time.

Information. There is a lack of information on individual rights when applying for benefits, and Citizen's Information and MABS do not seem as helpful as in the past. Many forms are now online, and lack of access to the internet is having an impact for some people. Further, many older people who do have access to the internet may not have the capacity to do their business online.

## **Services and Community Connectivity**

Children and technology featured strongly in these discussions. There was a general view that children are being too sheltered and not encouraged outside to play, which helps with risk taking, builds confidence, coping skills and resilience. These vital skills are not being developed as children progress through childhood, and is likely to be one of the reasons anxiety levels are on the increase and coping and resilience skills are low in some children. While the trend in the increased use screens, phones, technology etc. cannot be reversed, greater education is needed for parents and children about how to manage and use the technology responsibly.

The Meitheal Project for supporting families is starting to pick up momentum in the area. It is a very good initiative as it gets the services around the table working with the family and the child who are at risk.

If there was greater investment in health and wellbeing in the early years with children, it would reduce the drain on resources as they progress through their lives. This was the view of the MD consultation. It was also felt that behavioural issues left unchallenged now will result in serious problems in later years.

One of the real gaps in the area is the lack of sheltered housing for older people, and this is particularly important as the population continues to age. Meals on Wheels is not available across the entire area and not on all days of the week.

The waiting list to see a social worker in the area is unacceptably long. There is a lot of staff movement among Tusla Social Workers at the moment because of the Child Protection workload and there is an ongoing review where cases are being handed to other agencies where appropriate. However, this work has meant a backlog in the system and access to a social worker can take months. Further, the thresholds for access to a social worker have increased, meaning that many of the referrals may not qualify and be worked through the Meitheal system. Greater responsibilities are being put on community services without sufficient investment in resources.

## Health Services

Homecare and the availability of home help is one of the biggest issues in the area. This is similar to discussions with other areas in Donegal. It was felt that older people are being discharged from hospital without the necessary community supports in place. Families are less likely to be around to help as they have either moved away or are working and/ or have young families. From an OT perspective, the service goes to great trouble to get the necessary equipment into the homes but people are not being discharged, so the equipment is sitting in the house unused. No account is taken of geography in the Home Help scheduling, no travel time is included, but in a rural area it can take a long time to get from one place to another. This has to be factored into time allocated in a homecare package. There is poor communication between acute and primary care services during the transition phase from hospital to home and vice-versa.

The issue of more vulnerable members of the community missing appointments for reasons they cannot help was raised. As a result of this, they often end up going to the bottom of the queue when the reason for their non-attendance could be very valid e.g. transport, illness, literacy.

The Primary Care Team is not operating effectively with people unsure of their roles on the team. Members are getting frustrated as the same issues arise again and again (e.g. homecare), but they don't seem to be communicated anywhere and with no HSE facilitator or management representative on the PCT there is no feedback route. Questions were asked about the point of meeting if no one seems interested in hearing what the team has to say. There was great enthusiasm in the beginning, GPs were involved but it is hard to see the value in it now. Clinical meetings used to be held on a monthly basis but this was too long a wait to get response so now clinicians follow up via phone calls as needed. There will be case conferences for more complex cases and this works well. GP's are engaged in this aspect of primary care team working.

The medical card and the related procedures and processes was raised. Letters issued recently regarding change of circumstances are causing confusion; people do not think they need to reply as they don't think it applies to them and their card is subsequently cancelled. If a young person is living at home, unemployed and not paying rent, they are not eligible for a medical card. Forms in general are very complicated especially for people with literacy issues and people who are not digitally competent. There was the feeling that this complexity was deliberate to deter people from applying for what they have a right to.

Waiting lists for different disciplines was raised, with people noting that you can wait up to 15 months to see a consultant, irrespective of what the health issue is. A wait for an ambulance can be up to two hours, and if a previous call out has to wait at the Letterkenny University Hospital Emergency Department as the paramedics can't transfer the patient, it makes the wait even longer.

Respite for families caring for people with disabilities or other health issues is very limited. At a County level, there is 2 weeks per month available for all of the people in Donegal requiring respite. The MD consultation reported that families are finding it very difficult to access respite accommodation for their loved one and it only seems to be addressed when the situation reaches crisis point.

HSE frontline staff are severely overstretched, with increasing requests to complete documentation, training, surveys, statistics and assessments. The bureaucracy is overwhelming.



Some detailed issues were made around specific services:

- OT finds it difficult to get specialist equipment for people in their home, especially for palliative care patients and these referrals are increasing
- Waiting lists for OT are long; there are more than 60 people on the list in this area. The priority patients are seen quite quickly, the lesser the priority, the greater the waiting list (P2 patients are meant to be seen within 2 weeks but it could be months and P3 patients could be waiting more than 12 months. The service is understaffed and facing recruitment problems in terms of getting people to come to the area, as faced in other parts of the County
- There are inadequate supports for people with weight management issues

### **Economy and Deprivation**

Participants in this process felt that the true level of unemployment is masked by labour market schemes such as TUS and CE. The focus seems to be on getting people off the live register rather than to get real and meaningful jobs. While the schemes provide much needed support to community services and are valued for this, they are not long enough at one year and people are then forced to leave. They should be extended to provide much needed experience for the individual and much needed support to the community.

The issue of housing arose in this area, and particularly the access to good quality rented accommodation is very difficult. A lot of private rented accommodation is in a very poor state and families are living in sub-standard accommodation. There are many empty homes and yet still a shortage of properties to rent.

Food poverty is prevalent among some sections of the community as people struggle to make ends meet. The more nutritional food can be seen to be more expensive and many people lack the life skills around budgeting and cooking from scratch. The increase in low cost processed food is linked to childhood obesity.

### **Mental Health**

Mental health featured strongly in this consultation as in the other areas. The communities of Ballyshannon/ Bundoran are particularly concerned about young people and children facing pressure in their lives through social media, alcohol and drugs. The pressure seems to be starting earlier and earlier and leads to anxiety as children lack the skills and maturity to cope with these complex issues. Waiting lists for mental health services are far too long.

### **Healthy Ireland Priorities**

Substance Misuse. Greater understanding is needed around the hidden harm of alcohol and drug misuse, including over the counter and prescribed medication, and support needs to be in place for when people ask for help.

Physical Activity. Children need more physical activity and more time devoted to just being outside running around (see point above).

Positive Ageing. The Good Morning and Befriending services are great but a worry now they are being taken over nationally is that there will be little opportunity for local input.

Sexual Health. There are unrealistic expectations in relationships that is driven by, among other things, access to pornography. There needs to be greater education, discussion and information about sexual health, consent and young people.

### **Vulnerable Groups**

A number of groups were singled out for special attention as being more vulnerable and at greater risk of health inequalities:

- Older people. Loneliness and isolation a real concern as families are not around as much, and home help time is limited
- Young adults with disabilities
- Travellers and Roma. The biggest issue is with accommodation and the inadequate accommodation provision that causes undue stress
- Homeless people. The only hostel in the area is in Letterkenny, which is usually full and the real numbers are hidden as people are 'couch surfing'
- People living in poverty. There is a lot of hidden poverty, as people are living with relatives, friends or staying in very poor quality private rented accommodation
- Refugees/ resettled people who are facing integration and language challenges which causes isolation and fear
- People living in rural areas with increased risk of isolation (all ages)
- New mothers who do not have local/ family support and reduced support from Primary Care
- Palliative care patients

### **Positives identified in the Ballyshannon/ Bundoran PCT area**

- The Joint CHF/ PCT projects
- OTs have no problem getting standard equipment for people at home
- The CHF has received funding to pursue local initiatives
- Youth projects do great work in the area
- Lifestart provides good early years support (good in Bundoran, less so in Ballyshannon)
- The new Health Promotion role for the area is very welcome
- Acute services are usually very good when you get into them

## **4. Recommendations from the Ballychannon/ Bundoran Consultations**

### **Homecare:**

- Review and improve the provision of homecare in the area. With such a significant older population, many of the older residents are not getting the care or attention they need. Many people are not being discharged from hospital because the supports are not in place in the community, and yet are willing and able to go back home with a minimal amount of support
- Develop a patient information pack for homecare patients when they are discharged from hospital with useful numbers and support contacts

### **Primary Care Team Investment**

- Provide clarity on the role of the PCT and link this to a wider reinvigoration and investment in the PCTs

### **Childrens Services**

- Ensure there are sufficient resources in place at the local level to allow the Meitheal project to work effectively
- Work with community projects and schools to help develop the coping and resilience skills of children and young people

### **Reduce Bureaucracy**

- Simplify HSE and DSP forms where possible
- Ensure forms and information are available in hard copy and offline for people who do not have internet access or don't have the capacity to use it
- Review the checking/review process for medical cards
- Review the reason for DNAs and consider not always putting people to the bottom of the queue if they miss an appointment.

### **Service Improvements**

- Improve respite services for adults and children in Ballyshannon
- Increase OT staff in the area to help reduce waiting lists
- Provide specialized OT equipment in a more timely manner to meet patient need
- Develop and improve the Meals on Wheels service

### **Vulnerable Groups:**

- Donegal County Council to provide support to Travellers in securing adequate social housing more quickly taking account of need
- Intercultural sensitivity training for HSE staff and signage in more languages
- Implement the ethnic identifier on HSE and other agency systems

### **Alcohol and Substance Abuse:**

- Training for frontline staff around sensitivity when people ask for help in relation to alcohol/drug misuse
- Raise awareness of the link between substance misuse and poor mental health

### **Positive Mental Health**

- Provide more Stress Control programmes

### **Access**

- Better Information and Co-ordination
  - o Publicise the opening hours of NowDoc and other out of hours services as people are not aware of them
  - o Develop better joined up thinking within and between agencies, especially HSE and Tusla, where there is a big disconnect. Families are having to tell their stories over and over again and it puts people off accessing the supports and services they need
  - o Follow up on patients impacted by the Cervical Screening issues in the County
  - o Collate all the local CHF initiatives and see what skills/resources/supports are needed for these to be rolled out across the County