



# Strategy

## 2021–2025

Health research –  
making an impact

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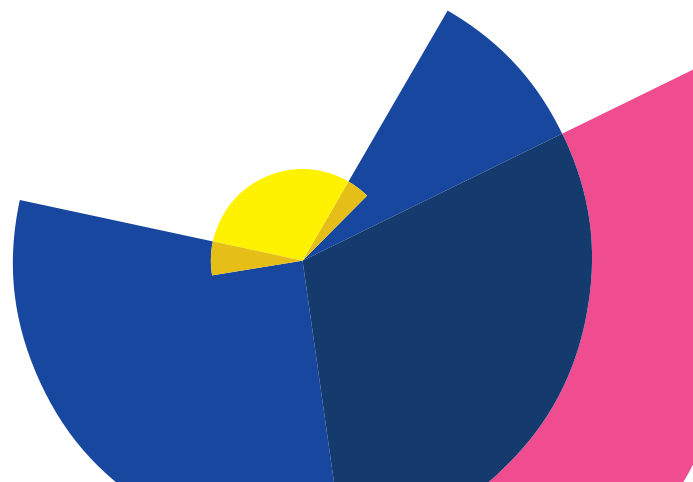
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# Introduction

Every advance in health or healthcare depends on high-quality research. The well-being of our society depends, to a significant degree, on the quality of our health research system. This holds true around the world. International evidence clearly shows that the countries which perform best in the face of major health challenges are those that invest in research, value access to reliable, timely data and base their decisions on robust evidence. As the lead funding agency for health research in Ireland, the Health Research Board (HRB) currently invests almost €50 million in health research each year to help ensure the Irish health research system is well positioned to inform better health and care.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated clearly the strong link between people's health, the capacity of our health and social care system, and the economy. Although it is well understood that we need a strong economy to pay for public services, including our health and social care system, the reality of living through a global pandemic delivered a stark reminder that a healthy population and a high-performing health and social care system are also essential for a functioning economy.

Research helps us better understand the social and economic determinants of health, and how to keep people healthy. It gives us the knowledge we need to understand the scientific basis of disease and illness and to develop new and more effective treatments. It provides the evidence for effective decision-making as well as for the equitable delivery of our health and social care services.

Over the past two decades, Government investment and commitment to research and development has brought about a significant improvement in Ireland's health research system and the HRB has played a central role in delivering this. Looking ahead, the Government's *Resilience and Recovery 2020–2021 Plan* acknowledges the crucial role of research and innovation in informing and shaping our public health and policy responses at a time when our health and social care system is being transformed. Sláintecare outlines an agreed vision and strategic plan for the transformation of the Irish health service, recognising the need for our healthcare system to be reoriented to ensure equitable access, and that the vast majority of care takes place in primary and social care settings.

To support the delivery of these national health priorities, the HRB will continue to advance research, data and evidence, ensuring that research is recognised as the key to having a healthy population and consequently a functioning economy.

To date, HRB funding has led to important breakthroughs in our understanding of health and treatment and brought about significant improvements in Ireland's health research infrastructure. This has been achieved through our support for talented researchers and health professionals across academia



and the health system. The HRB's evidence synthesis service is an established and trusted resource for policy-makers, with information collected and analysed by the HRB used to support service planning in key areas. In the last year, the HRB has taken significant steps to modernise the governance of health research in Ireland and bring it into line with European regulations and international best practice.

This forward-looking strategy reflects the HRB's unique position at the interface of the health, social care and academic systems. It builds on work done by the HRB to support and improve health and inform the delivery of high-quality services.

Developed following a process of extensive engagement with stakeholders, together with input from an International Expert Advisory Panel, the strategy sets out a clear direction for the HRB and is built around six interlinked and mutually supportive objectives.

Over the next five years, the HRB will:

1. Invest in research that delivers value for health, the health system, society, and the economy.
2. Be an independent, credible voice for research and evidence, and a trusted thought leader.
3. Promote and enable the use of data to shape health policy, enhance healthcare delivery, and drive broader research and innovation initiatives.
4. Build a strong and supportive environment for health research in Ireland.
5. Foster and enhance European and international coordination, collaboration and engagement.
6. Develop the HRB as a progressive place to work, where our people are supported to be innovative and responsive.

As we work to achieve these objectives, we want to see research and evidence translated into practical benefits for policy and practice. We will accomplish this by providing leadership in health and social care research, collecting and analysing evidence and data, creating strategic partnerships and alliances, and enhancing health sector participation in research and innovation. We will strengthen knowledge brokering and translation activities, evaluating what works best on a regular basis.

We will work in partnership with the research community and with other research organisations both nationally and internationally, actively developing collaborations that deliver advances in health research which support effective decision making and develop our health and social care system.

Above all, the HRB is committed to being inclusive both in what we do and the way we work. Public trust and confidence are essential for health research. The HRB has led the way in Ireland in involving the public and patients in research and we are committed to further developing and strengthening our engagement with the wider community over the lifetime of the HRB Strategy 2021–2025. We will place the voice of the public, patients and carers at the core of everything we do.

# Our vision

Better health through excellent research, data and evidence.



# Our mission

To support research that improves people's health, promotes evidence-informed care and creates solutions to societal challenges.



# 2021-2025 strategic objectives




# Our values




## Leadership

We are **leaders** in supporting and raising the standard of health and social care research, evidence and data nationally.




## Independence

We are an **independent** and **trusted voice** for research evidence in health and social care.




## Accountability

We are **accountable** and take ownership for ensuring the best possible standards in the research that we fund, the research we do and the data that we manage.




## Quality

We uphold the **highest quality standards** and levels of professionalism in all aspects of the HRB's work.




## Responsiveness

We are agile and innovative in how **we respond to the research needs** of society and the health system.




## Collaboration

We **collaborate** nationally and internationally and work with a broad range of stakeholders across all HRB activities.



## Inclusiveness

We **aim to include** and engage with a diverse range of people in the work we do, treating everyone fairly and **equitably**.



**Strategic  
objective**

**1**





# Invest in research that delivers value for health, the health system, society, and the economy

## *Research that makes a difference*

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Research forms the basis of many of the advances in healthcare that make a real difference to people's lives and underpin a resilient society and economy. As Ireland's largest funder of health and social care research, the HRB's investments have played a vital role in building and supporting an innovative health research community across academia and healthcare, creating the knowledge needed to address major health challenges and benefit the economy.

Over the next five years, we will deliver a strategic and well-balanced funding portfolio that responds to the needs of the population, the health and social care system, and the economy. This means balancing our support for research in targeted priority areas with funding for investigator-led research and emerging and innovative health research areas. It also means working collaboratively with partners in the health and academic systems to support research that addresses key strategic challenges in our health system.

As Ireland moves to a more integrated model of health and social care in the community, we want the research we fund to be relevant and usable. The HRB has led the way in making health research more inclusive. We will continue to support the meaningful involvement of the public, patients and carers in research, and build capacity in the research community to do the same. We believe that putting knowledge users at the centre of all stages of the research that we fund, from design to delivery of results, will lead to improved research outcomes that are more likely to be applied in practice and deliver the greatest benefit for Ireland and its people.

## Key HRB actions

### 1.1

Engage with partners in the health and social care system and with other funders to facilitate dialogue on key issues and agendas in order to ensure stronger collaboration, coordination and prioritisation.

#### Implementation actions

**1.1.1** Convene a health research liaison group with R&D leads in the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) in order to facilitate dialogue and coordination of the health research agenda.

**1.1.2** Work bilaterally and at interdepartmental level to position and advance health research within the broader national policy agenda for research and innovation.

**1.1.3** Collaborate with the HSC Public Health Agency and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland to advance all-island activities in areas of mutual interest.

### 1.2

Invest in research that informs the decisions and actions of knowledge users in the Irish health and social care system.

#### Implementation actions

**1.2.1** Support the Department of Health in advancing research actions in the *Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021 Plan for Living with Covid-19*, including in areas such as clinical trials, capacity building and research and data infrastructure.

**1.2.2** Co-design a new collaborative research initiative with the Department of Health that is responsive to the Department's health and social care policy needs and Sláintecare transformation.

**1.2.3** Support applied research projects in which researchers and knowledge users come together to advance timely and relevant research and optimise knowledge translation into policy and practice.

**1.2.4** Invest in clinical trials and intervention studies to drive excellence and innovation and to deliver benefits for patients, the health system, and the economy.

### 1.3

Continue to support high-quality, investigator-led research to create new knowledge that, over time, will help to address major health challenges in society and have an impact on tomorrow's healthcare.

#### Implementation actions

**1.3.1** Fund a broad spectrum of high-quality, investigator-initiated projects that can respond to emerging challenges for health and social care.

**1.3.2** Explore mechanisms to support projects with potential higher risk and higher gain as well as proof of concept studies.

**1.3.3** Work with national partners to co-fund strategically relevant health research projects and programmes.

**1.3.4** Support research networks and organisations that enhance capacity, collaboration and impact and bring together relevant stakeholder groups.

**1.4**

Involve the public, patients and carers in HRB-funded research in order to ensure that it is relevant and usable and can catalyse cultural change in the research system.

### Implementation actions

**1.4.1** Incorporate the views of the public, patients and carers into HRB funding decisions and other activities, where appropriate.

**1.4.2** Build capacity and skills for the meaningful involvement of the public, patients and carers in health research.

**1.4.3** Champion the involvement of the public, patients and carers in research in order to strengthen the quality, relevance and usability of health research and develop a vision and plan for the next phase of innovative HRB supports.

**1.4.4** Work with national and international partners to develop practices regarding the involvement of the public, patients and carers in research.

**1.5**

Drive excellence in health research practices by overseeing and promoting high standards of research management and governance.

### Implementation actions

**1.5.1** Ensure that the HRB call design, peer review, selection and monitoring processes continue to drive the quality, relevance and impact of HRB-funded research.

**1.5.2** Support effective management of the HRB portfolio of active research awards in line with best practice processes, policies and appropriate governance.

**1.5.3** Continue to develop the underpinning technological systems to support HRB peer review, selection, management, governance and evaluation activities, and to minimise research waste.

**1.5.4** Develop and conduct and/or commission a research on research programme to provide evidence for continuous improvement of HRB research funding practices across the funding life cycle.

**1.5.5** Work with national and international partners to advance opportunities for research on research initiatives.

**1.6**

Measure, monitor and evaluate the HRB funding portfolio on a regular basis to assess effectiveness, relevance, outcomes, impact and return on investment.

### Implementation actions

**1.6.1** Refresh the HRB's evaluation plan to align with strategic evidence needs.

**1.6.2** Ensure that HRB evaluation methodologies and metrics are in line with international best practice.

**1.6.3** Work with national and international partners on evaluation initiatives that benchmark HRB health research investments.

**1.6.4** Develop and implement mechanisms to integrate evaluation data with other HRB information systems to facilitate continual monitoring of the strategic balance of HRB research investment.



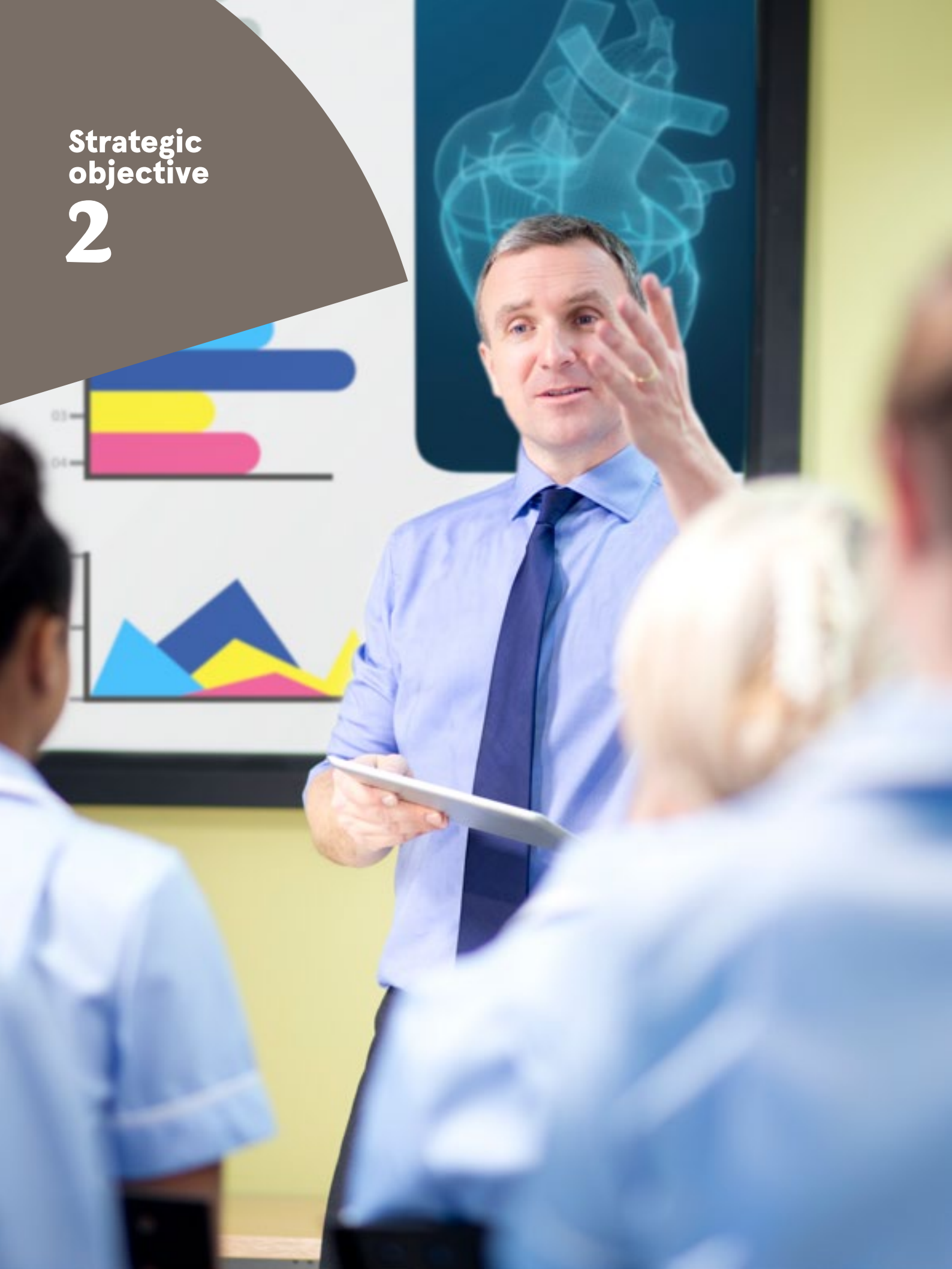
## What does success look like?

- There is a coordinated and cohesive approach to health research at national level.
- HRB funding will have enabled ambitious and impactful research projects, guided by the needs of Ireland's population and the health and social care system.
- HRB research will have delivered measurable societal value and contributed towards economic development in Ireland.
- HRB research will have played an important role in supporting the transformation of the health and social care system under Sláintecare.
- The public, patients and carers will be involved in health research and their views will inform HRB funding decisions and other activities.
- All-island research activities will have been advanced in areas of mutual interest.
- The HRB is measuring the return on its investments and is demonstrating clearly the impact of its activities.



Strategic  
objective

2



# Be an independent, credible voice for research and evidence, and a trusted thought leader

## *An independent voice*

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The primary purpose of research is to generate high-quality, independent and credible evidence. Now, more than ever, policy-makers and health professionals need that evidence to inform their decisions about healthcare policy, delivery and regulation. Individuals also need evidence they can trust to inform the management of their own health.

In the past decade, the HRB has built up a highly regarded national resource through its evidence synthesis service. This service provides credible research evidence and supports its translation into health practice, policy and regulation. The HRB also plays a key role in enhancing Ireland's capacity to conduct evidence reviews and synthesis and in informing the development of clinical guidelines. Over the next five years, the HRB will enhance its role in this area and seek to achieve greater coordination and synergies between those involved in evidence synthesis nationally, while increasing collaborations with international partners.

In a world where increasing volumes of health information and the speed of communications can lead to misinformation and misinterpretation, the HRB will aim to earn and maintain people's trust as an independent and credible voice in respect of the evidence and outputs we produce. We will also facilitate dialogue with stakeholders in response to emerging scientific, technological or policy developments which have implications for health, health research or the health system.

## Key HRB actions

### 2.1

Provide a high-quality and responsive evidence service to support policy, practice and evaluation for the Department of Health and other stakeholders in health and social care.

#### Implementation actions

**2.1.1** Continue to provide the Department of Health with a wide and flexible portfolio of evidence products and services each year.

**2.1.2** Use knowledge brokering activities to translate policy questions into research questions to be answered in evidence products.

**2.1.3** Use best practice international systematic review guidelines to prepare evidence products.

**2.1.4** Provide access to the HRB National Drugs Library to enable evidence-informed decision-making by those working in the area of problem substance use in Ireland.

**2.1.5** Employ innovative knowledge translation activities to provide key information in accessible formats and to optimise uptake and impact on policy and practice.

### 2.2

Promote and support national and international evidence review and synthesis activities in order to build capacity, address knowledge gaps, inform guidelines and provide guidance to policy-makers and practitioners.

#### Implementation actions

**2.2.1** Build knowledge and awareness of the importance of evidence synthesis among the public, healthcare institutions, policy-makers, clinicians and researchers on the island of Ireland.

**2.2.2** Provide free access to the Cochrane Library to people in Ireland.

**2.2.3** Support training and methodological research in evidence synthesis, including funding of Cochrane Ireland, to deliver high-quality evidence in areas of interest to knowledge users.

**2.2.4** Invest in initiatives that facilitate and enhance the use of high-quality, relevant, accessible systematic reviews and other synthesised research evidence to inform and guide policy and practice.

**2.2.5** Establish a structured mechanism to coordinate and strengthen the activities of those involved in evidence synthesis in Ireland and to increase Ireland's reach and profile internationally in this area.

**2.2.6** Facilitate the collation and publication of evidence gaps and methodological issues identified in the course of systematic and rapid reviews to guide the actions of the research community and research funders.



## 2.3

Play a leading role in stimulating dialogue with stakeholders, including the public, to respond to emerging developments in research, health and society.

### Implementation actions

**2.3.1** Conduct foresight and horizon scanning to identify emerging scientific, technological or policy developments with potential national implications for health and health research.

**2.3.2** Facilitate open dialogue and debate to enable the exchange of different ideas, opinions and perspectives on emerging and important health research issues.

**2.3.3** Actively engage researchers, practitioners, the public and policy-makers, as appropriate, to build consensus and to drive change in areas of importance in health research, data and evidence.

## 2.4

Position the HRB as a trusted, objective source for health research and evidence to guide policy, inform decision-making and influence behaviour.

### Implementation actions

**2.4.1** Communicate the impact of HRB work clearly and effectively to defined audiences in order to build awareness, reinforce credibility, and build trust.

**2.4.2** Promote the importance of research evidence and information in national health strategies.

**2.4.3** Proactively enhance the profile and reputation of the HRB as thought leaders in our specialist areas of interest.





## What does success look like?

- There will be a national, structured and coordinated approach to evidence synthesis.
- Ireland will have the capacity to support evidence-based policy-making in health and social care.
- Research and evidence will be embedded in key decisions for health and care services and will underpin national health strategies.
- There will be a greater level of knowledge and awareness of the importance of evidence synthesis among the public, healthcare institutions, policy-makers, clinicians and researchers on the island of Ireland.
- People, practitioners and policy-makers will recognise, trust and act on evidence provided by the HRB.
- The HRB will be an acknowledged influencer of health, social care and research policy development and will play a leading role in Ireland's collective understanding of emerging developments in research relevant for health, social care and well-being.
- The HRB will be recognised as a thought leader in key areas of health research management, policy, evidence and data.

Strategic  
objective

3





# Promote and enable the use of data to shape health policy, enhance healthcare delivery, and drive broader research and innovation initiatives



## *Trusted data*

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Better access to, and use of, health and social care data has the potential to transform the way that healthcare is delivered as well as how we manage our own health. The HRB has already demonstrated real strength in this area, leading the development of national research data standards and working with partners to facilitate access to the national Covid-19 data hub. Our health information systems are a valuable national resource, providing quality data to policy-makers and service providers in the areas of disability, alcohol and drug use, and mental health.

Over the next five years, and aligned with the development of a new national health information systems strategy by the Department of Health, we will promote better collection, sharing, linkage and transparent governance of health data nationally. The development of a national, coordinated and secure data hub will facilitate the use of health and social care data for research purposes. The hub will allow Irish researchers and policy-makers to mine the rich but dispersed sources of data already available and enable their use to rapidly build capability and scale in applied research. By working with national partners such as the Central Statistics Office (CSO), and through active participation in European initiatives with the same ambition, we can deliver significant benefits, including better management of resources and more targeted health initiatives.

As an organisation with a positive reputation for knowledge, expertise and insights in health data, research and evidence, the HRB will play a leading role in increasing public awareness and understanding of the importance of optimising its use and re-use for evidence-informed decision-making and the development of a more innovative health service. The HRB will also play a critical role in ensuring the adoption of best practice and standards in data management and governance by researchers and research-active healthcare organisations. This is critical to maintaining high levels of public trust and confidence in health research in Ireland.

## Key HRB actions

### 3.1

Play a leading role with other stakeholders to promote and enable the infrastructure and environment for the optimal use of health and social care data and statistical data for research.

#### Implementation actions

**3.1.1** Influence the design, development and implementation of the national health information systems strategy.

**3.1.2** Influence and support the development of a data hub for Ireland which optimises secure access to linked administrative and statistical data for policy/planning and for research purposes, including for Covid-19.

**3.1.3** Work with national and international partners to participate in EU initiatives that support a common European health data space in order to promote health data exchange and support research.

**3.1.4** Invest in research projects which employ secondary data analysis and record linkage.

### 3.2

Grow and develop the HRB's national health information systems to provide quality, timely and relevant data to policy-makers, service providers and researchers.

#### Implementation actions

**3.2.1** Collect, validate and report essential data for policy and service planning purposes in the areas of disability, drugs and alcohol, and mental health.

**3.2.2** Devise a data quality framework for all national health information systems and roll out a programme of training to data providers on data quality issues.

**3.2.3** Continue to develop and enhance LINK, our online data collection system, and engage with key stakeholders on its potential for future specialist data collections.

### 3.3

Work with partners to optimise the use of data from the HRB's national health information systems for research purposes, with a particular focus on alcohol and drug use, disabilities and mental health.

#### Implementation actions

**3.3.1** Devise a three-year research programme associated with each national health information system and develop collaborations with academics and researchers for its delivery.

**3.3.2** Hold annual policy forums with key policy-makers and politicians to promote and disseminate the reporting from each system.

### 3.4

Use commissioned primary research and secondary data analysis to support drug and alcohol strategies at a national and European level.

#### Implementation actions

**3.4.1** Complete the HRB actions under *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017–2025*.

**3.4.2** Collect, analyse and report factual, objective, reliable and comparable information on the drug situation, consequences and responses in Ireland for the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

**3.4.3** Publish four issues of the HRB's drugs research and policy bulletin, *Drugnet Ireland*.

**3.4.4** Assist the Department of Health to monitor the Public Health Alcohol Act through data collection, validation, analysis and dissemination.

### 3.5

Support the regulatory work of the Health Research Consent Declaration Committee (HRCDC) in contributing to health data being used in a transparent, trusted and safeguarded manner, and in the public interest.

#### Implementation actions

**3.5.1** Support the HRCDC administratively, operationally and technically, to enable it to perform its regulatory function in a transparent, professional and efficient manner.

**3.5.2** Communicate the business of the HRCDC with transparency and clarity, through communication and engagement with the public, patient advocacy groups, research forums and networks, and the wider research community.

**3.5.3** Promote the decisions of the HRCDC to inform the research community and the public about the data protection safeguards that are expected to be met, and the importance of transparency and public involvement for maintaining trust and confidence in health research.

**3.5.4** Engage actively with the Department of Health and other national and international stakeholders as necessary, to support and drive health research policy and robust governance in research.

### 3.6

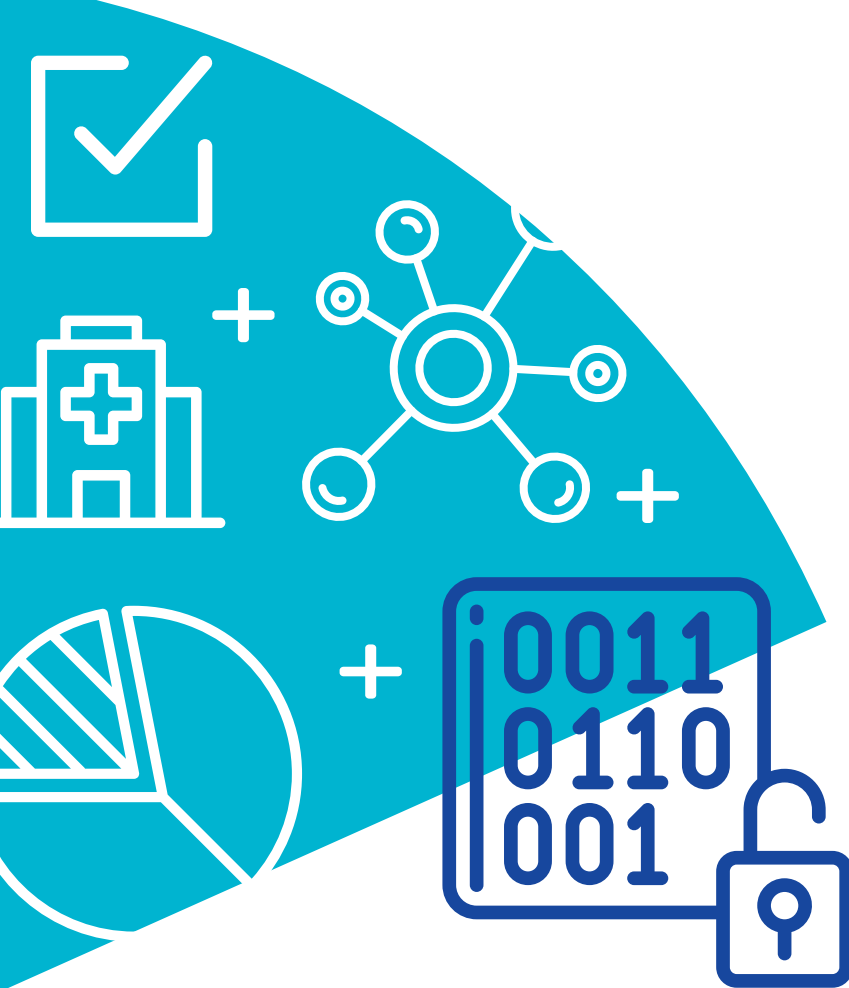
Take a national leadership role in driving the FAIR\* data and open research agendas. (\*findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable)

#### Implementation actions

**3.6.1** Work with national and international partners to develop and support initiatives to drive FAIR, open, interconnected, and data-driven health research in Ireland.

**3.6.2** Enhance capacity and guidance for data management and stewardship, data curation and implementation of FAIR principles within the Irish research system.

**3.6.3** Implement a supportive Data Management Plan (DMP) infrastructure service, and work to harmonise requirements for DMPs across stakeholders.



## What does success look like?

- The HRB will have played a recognised role in ensuring that national applied data infrastructure supports research for health, social care and well-being.
- The HRB will have contributed to a national data research hub, housing safe and reliable health and social care data and setting standards for effective and secure data use.
- Ireland will have been an active partner in EU initiatives that supported a common European health data space and informed Ireland's national health information systems strategy.
- The HRB's national health information systems will be used to support policy, planning and service delivery and the development of applied research.
- HRB data and evidence will inform the implementation of the national drugs and alcohol strategies.
- Patients, the public, researchers and policy-makers will understand and buy into the importance of sharing data to improve health and social care decision-making and policy, and have confidence in the way that health data are used for research.
- Health research and data in Ireland will be open and FAIR.





**Strategic  
objective**

**4**





# Build a strong and supportive environment for health research in Ireland



## *Thriving research environment*

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High-quality health research that delivers value needs a supportive and enabling environment in which to thrive. This environment has many essential facets, including skilled researchers, access to appropriate infrastructure and expertise, and policies that support and enhance good research practice. It is vital that the HRB works to ensure that funding and support for Ireland's health researchers and research infrastructure are delivered effectively and that research is conducted to the highest standards of governance, quality and ethics. This will position Ireland to respond better to the needs of society and the economy, and to meet the regulatory and quality requirements of a vibrant research system.

Nationally, the HRB has played a leadership role in identifying and addressing critical skills, infrastructure and research policy gaps. In the next five years, the HRB will work with a range of stakeholders, including health and social care services, regulators, policy-makers, legislators, higher education institutions, industry and charities to consolidate these achievements, expand its supports and identify new opportunities to enable Irish health research to thrive.

The HRB will continue to champion and work with others to ensure the development and uptake of innovative practices by the research community in Ireland. This will advance Ireland's position as an attractive location in which to do research and benefit from global partnerships.

## Key HRB actions

### 4.1

Invest strategically in research leadership and build the capacity of academic researchers and health and social care practitioners to respond to current and emerging health research needs.

#### Implementation actions

**4.1.1** Support existing and new cohort-based structured PhD training programmes to build capacity and scale in areas of current or emerging need.

**4.1.2** Provide career development opportunities for postdoctoral researchers from academic and health professional backgrounds to enhance national capacity in applied health research.

**4.1.3** Provide opportunities for emerging investigators and emerging clinician scientists to establish themselves as independent investigators and to generate actionable knowledge for policy and practice.

**4.1.4** Promote and embed strategic research leadership in health and academic settings working in close collaboration with knowledge users.

**4.1.5** Work with national and international partners to facilitate training and exchange opportunities that address skills gaps aligned with the HRB research career framework and the HRB's overall strategy.

### 4.2

Working with partners, invest in a coordinated clinical trials infrastructure to deliver benefits for patients and the innovation agenda, and with enhanced integration into the health system.

#### Implementation actions

**4.2.1** Co-fund the operation of safe and vibrant clinical research facilities and further develop their governance.

**4.2.2** Support clinical trials networks in different thematic areas that underpin the conduct of high-quality multi-centre clinical trials.

**4.2.3** Ensure a coordinating mechanism for high-quality multi-centre clinical trials, to enhance the standards of the clinical trials environment and their conduct in Ireland.

**4.2.4** Support training in both basic and complex trial design and delivery, and advance research into trial methodology and reporting.

**4.2.5** Ensure continued relevance and impact of HRB investment in clinical trials infrastructure through oversight and expert guidance.

**4.2.6** Engage with the European Clinical Research Infrastructure Network (ECRIN) to access its tools and services to support Ireland's involvement in pan-European trials.

### 4.3

Take a leading role to convene stakeholders to progress the design, development and implementation of national shared, high-cost research infrastructures, including in the areas of biobanking and genomic research.

#### Implementation actions

**4.3.1** Convene a forum of national stakeholders to co-develop a road map and costed implementation plan for biobanking in Ireland that supports both health and broader Government research objectives.

**4.3.2** Engage with the Department of Health, the HSE and others to explore opportunities and interfaces for current and future investments in genomic research and personalised medicine.

**4.3.3** Engage in discussions with national and international partners, as appropriate, to discuss how existing or planned research infrastructures are funded, governed, and operated.

## 4.4

Lead the transformation of the national research ethics system in Ireland to deliver a robust, efficient and transparent review framework that engenders the trust of key stakeholders, including the public.

### Implementation actions

**4.4.1** Establish the National Office for Research Ethics Committees as an agile and trusted office in the public service.

**4.4.2** Partner with the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and the Department of Health to devise a road map for transformation to a national system of research ethics review in order to ensure national preparedness for the pending EU Clinical Trials Regulation and the Medical Device Regulation.

**4.4.3** Establish and operationalise a national research ethics committee (NREC) for Clinical Trials of Investigational Medicinal Products (CTIMPs) and Medical Devices, as well as an Appeals Committee.

**4.4.4** Support the NREC Covid-19 to ensure appropriate oversight of its approved research as an enduring component of the national coordinated research response.

**4.4.5** Establish thought leadership by the National Office for Research Ethics Committees in the area of research ethics by providing trusted information, seeding discussion, and advancing debate.

## 4.5

Together with national, EU and international partners, develop and shape health research-related policies, regulations and procedures, and support their implementation in Ireland.

### Implementation actions

**4.5.1** Guide the development and adoption of best practice in Ireland in policy areas that are relevant to Irish health research.

**4.5.2** Work through global networks, funders and associations to promote a common agenda and positions on health research policy.

**4.5.3** Influence research-relevant regulation and legislative developments internationally through submissions to, and participation in, relevant European policy-focused organisations and legislative bodies.





## What does success look like?

- Ireland will have the capacity in place to respond to current and emerging health research needs.
- Ireland will have a coordinated, integrated clinical trials infrastructure in place, delivering benefits for patients and the innovation agenda.
- Ireland will perform favourably alongside other comparable Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the quality of its clinical trials, with all trials registered and all results reported.
- Ireland will have implemented a national genomics research strategy, integrated with the clinical system and a national biobanking infrastructure.
- The HRB will engage with national and international partners to identify and put in place mechanisms and infrastructure to support skills training.
- The National Office for Research Ethics Committees will be established as an agile and trusted office in the public service.
- Ireland will be recognised as influencing and adopting international best practice in health research policy.

Strategic  
objective

5





# Foster and enhance European and international coordination, collaboration and engagement

## *Productive international partnerships*

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Many of the greatest health and societal challenges we face are global and can only be addressed through international collaboration and partnership.

Pandemics and climate change are just two examples of areas where researchers around the world are joining forces to find solutions. The research community in Ireland can play its part by working with partners in other European countries and around the world to make a difference to people's lives.

Some of the best and most productive research is done by international teams working together. For smaller countries like Ireland, collaboration creates the opportunity to avail of larger-scale resources and wider expertise to achieve things that could not be done alone. Opportunities presented by European and international funding are stepping-stones to participation in larger research projects. After Brexit, it will be even more important for Ireland to maintain its links with the UK, while growing and developing new partnerships and networks around Europe.

Over the next five years, the HRB will support Ireland's research community to compete for EU and international funding. We will work with policy-makers and other government stakeholders, including in service delivery, to identify synergies and opportunities for national participation in, and leadership of, research and policy initiatives that can advance health, health research and broader government objectives. In doing so, the HRB will prioritise partnerships that build on the established strengths of health research across the island of Ireland and maximise learning from countries with similar health systems and challenges.

## Key HRB actions

### 5.1

Forge strategic alliances with European and international partners to tackle global health challenges and complex societal issues and strengthen Ireland's profile as a knowledge economy.

#### Implementation actions

**5.1.1** Work with the European Union (EU), World Health Organisation (WHO) and the international research community to evaluate the effectiveness of treatments and vaccines for Covid-19.

**5.1.2** Map current levels of engagement with international organisations and alliances, such as the EU, the WHO and the OECD, in relation to health research and identify opportunities to enhance Ireland's engagement.

**5.1.3** Identify opportunities to contribute to the achievement/implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all United Nations Member States as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### 5.2

Drive transformative agendas in national health research by informing strategic choices and maintaining an expert understanding of the evolving European research landscape.

#### Implementation actions

**5.2.1** Create high-quality new knowledge on the evolving European research landscape through systematic horizon scanning, and where appropriate, foster its diffusion and improve its uptake with key stakeholders.

**5.2.2** Engage in strategic dialogue to agree on areas where national support and investment in EU initiatives can advance health, health research and broader government objectives.

**5.2.3** Convene stakeholders to elicit Ireland's position and priorities in certain areas in order to shape the development and implementation of EU strategic research agendas.

### 5.3

Strengthen, develop and invest in co-funding collaborations with other EU and international agencies and organisations in targeted areas of health research.

#### Implementation actions

**5.3.1** Add value to existing HRB and national investments by shaping the Irish contribution to EU co-funding initiatives and EU partnerships, including the Transforming Health and Care Systems EU Partnership, the Coordinating and Support Action in developing standard operating procedures for research integrity, and Joint Programming Initiatives and ERA-Nets in brain diseases, translational cancer, antimicrobial resistance, personalised medicine and rare diseases.

**5.3.2** Lead Irish participation in EU joint programming initiatives (JPIs) of strategic relevance, including neurodegenerative disease (JPND), healthy diet, healthy life (JPI HDHL) and antimicrobial resistance (JPI AMR).

**5.3.3** Explore new opportunities and strengthen existing co-funding and policy collaborations.

## 5.4

Support the Irish health research community, policy-makers and service delivery counterparts to compete directly in EU funding programmes.

### Implementation actions

**5.4.1** Create awareness and provide support to the Irish research community to participate in the Horizon Europe funding programme.

**5.4.2** Create awareness and provide support to the Irish research community, policy-makers and service delivery counterparts to participate in the EU4Health Programme.

**5.4.3** Work within the National Support Network and relevant European networks to support the Irish research community, policy-makers and service delivery counterparts to leverage full potential from opportunities available under other EU funding programmes, and maximise synergies with the core health programmes.

**5.4.4** Influence EU and international health research funding programmes to ensure best alignment between research environments, future funding opportunities and Ireland's research strengths.

## What does success look like?

- Ireland will have played its part in identifying and evaluating effective treatments for Covid-19.
- Ireland will have partnered in EU and international health research and policy projects that have addressed priority challenges and delivered solutions.
- The HRB will be recognised as having an expert understanding of the European research landscape through systematic horizon scanning and engagement with key stakeholders.
- Leadership and direction from the HRB will have contributed to Ireland's strong record in securing EU and international health research funding, including Horizon Europe and the EU4Health Programme.
- HRB-supported international research collaborations will have provided research outcomes (publications, expertise, networks), evidence and data that benefit Ireland's health and social care systems.
- The HRB will have enhanced its engagement with, and contributed to, the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs).

Strategic objective

6





# Develop the HRB as a progressive place to work, where our people are supported to be innovative and responsive



## *Organisational excellence*

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Over the lifetime of this strategy the HRB will deliver on its clear objectives to improve people's health through excellent research, data and evidence. As a leading agency for health and social care research, evidence and data, nationally and internationally, our goal as an organisation is to be the best.

We will maintain our culture of organisational excellence based on shared values that attracts the best talent, embraces change, delivers innovative solutions and consistently seeks to reinvent itself. By embedding a culture of quality in the organisation we will retain, support and attract the best expertise and skills by ensuring that our systems, processes and procedures meet the very highest standards.

Our governance structures will support informed and accountable decision-making underpinned by responsive leadership, risk management processes and compliance.

We will work to enhance recognition of the HRB's identity, influence and reputation among staff and stakeholders, creating new ways to reach key audiences and enhancing capability across the organisation to communicate with impact.

## Key HRB actions

### 6.1

Promote a positive organisational culture and provide our people with the skills, processes and capabilities needed to continuously develop, improve and adapt to changing needs.

#### Implementation actions

**6.1.1** Position the Human Resources team in the HRB to focus strategically on organisational performance.

**6.1.2** Develop a rolling workforce plan to align resourcing skills and needs to the HRB's ongoing requirements.

**6.1.3** Proactively review and develop flexible and innovative ways of working, including feasibility around use of emerging technology and flexible working methods.

**6.1.4** Develop an overarching health and well-being framework.

**6.1.5** Promote a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion, and ethical behaviour in all aspects of HRB work.

### 6.2

Operate and adhere to the highest standards of corporate governance supported by a high-performing Board and its committees.

#### Implementation actions

**6.2.1** Proactively manage risk in order to maximise opportunities and minimise the impact of adverse events on the HRB and the implementation of its strategic objectives.

**6.2.2** Establish and maintain best practice information governance.

**6.2.3** Monitor and report on strategy implementation and provide information to support decision-making.

**6.2.4** Ensure the effectiveness of internal controls.

**6.2.5** Monitor and implement developments in best practice corporate governance.

### 6.3

Deliver value for money and optimise financial operations in partnership with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that timely, accurate and meaningful financial information is available to inform decision-making.

#### Implementation actions

**6.3.1** Align finance structures and systems to optimally support the HRB's strategic objectives.

**6.3.2** Engage with stakeholders and undertake benchmarking exercises to ensure that best practice is followed.

**6.4**

Ensure that the HRB's ICT systems are reliable, resilient, cyber secure and focused on digital innovation.

### Implementation actions

- 6.4.1** Migrate our IT infrastructure to a cloud alternative.
- 6.4.2** Proactively manage all aspects of our IT infrastructure to support day-to-day business.
- 6.4.3** Follow best practice in the area of data governance.
- 6.4.4** Work with Governance and Data Protection Officer to maintain our General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) practices, while adhering to all existing GDPR policies.
- 6.4.5** Ensure that our internal and public-facing systems are cyber secure by carrying out appropriate ICT security audits.
- 6.4.6** Be proactive in researching and implementing digital innovations that support the organisation.

**6.5**

Deliver on ambitious sustainability and climate action goals.

### Implementation actions

- 6.5.1** Meet and exceed our energy efficiency targets, as set by the EU.
- 6.5.2** Embed energy efficiency into our work practices.

**6.6**

Enhance communications capability across the organisation to communicate with impact.

### Implementation actions

- 6.6.1** Enhance communications capacity among staff through effective training, policies, procedures and toolkits, so that they are equipped to communicate with impact.
- 6.6.2** Develop the communications infrastructure, including websites and social media platforms, to support key messaging.
- 6.6.3** Collaborate with the research community to enhance promotion and develop a network of champions for health research and evidence.



## What does success look like?

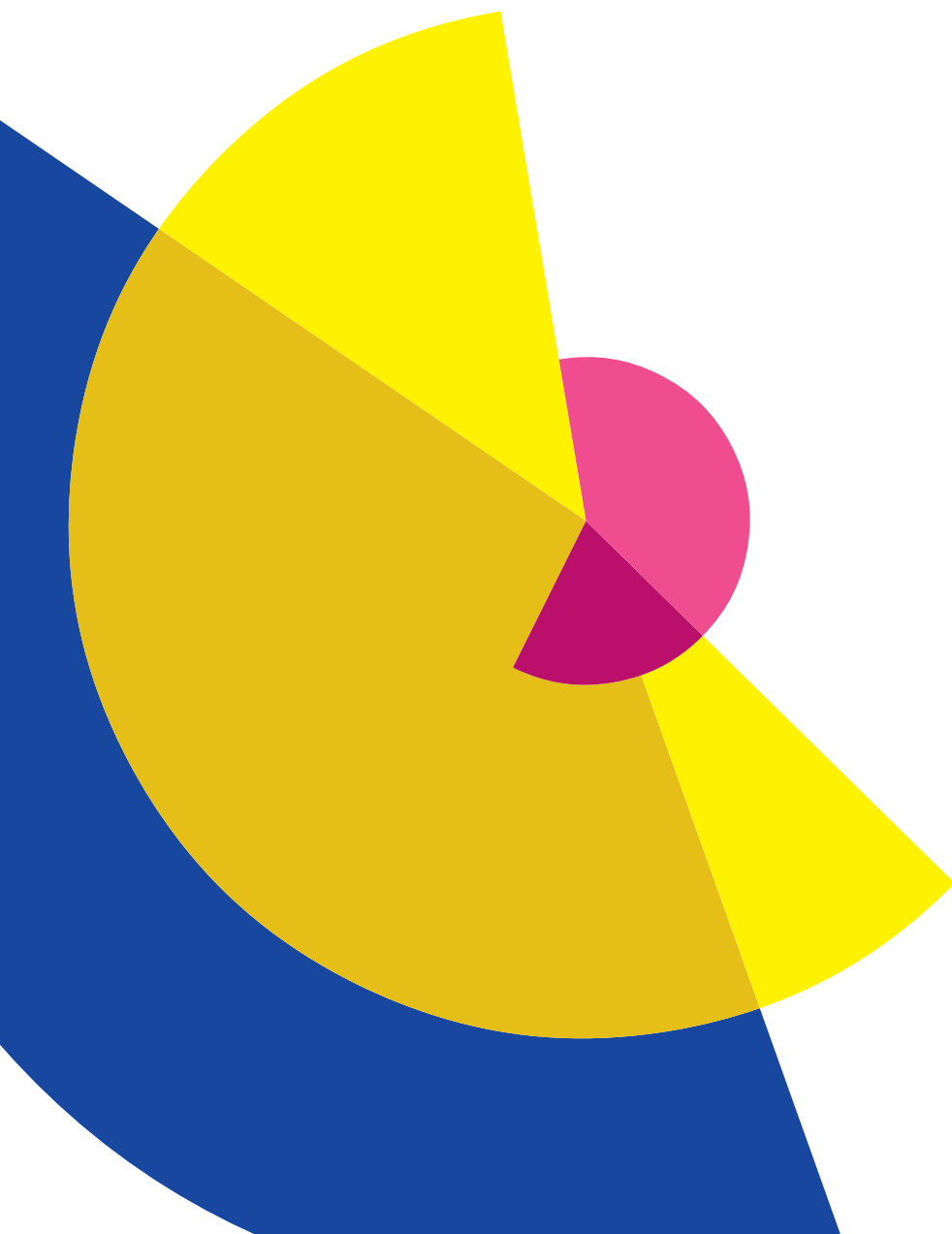
- Staff will have the skills, expertise and agility to consistently deliver on the HRB's strategic objectives.
- The HRB will be recognised as a great place to work, with a diverse range of people, making it an employer of choice for data, research and evidence professionals.
- The HRB's ICT systems and facilities will have been accredited by a recognised professional body and will be reliable, resilient, cyber secure and focused on digital innovation.
- The HRB will be recognised as an environmentally responsible organisation.
- The HRB will deliver value for money, and decision-making will be informed by meaningful financial information.
- The HRB will follow best practice information, data and corporate governance.
- Staff will communicate with impact and the HRB will have a network of champions for health research and evidence.





# Appendix A

## HRB Strategy 2021–2025 development process



In developing this strategy, the Board and executive team considered the current and evolving functions of the HRB and the transformational changes envisaged for Ireland’s health and social care services under Sláintecare. We considered the opportunities and the threats facing the environment in which the HRB operates across research, data and evidence, and the HRB’s role in a rapidly changing landscape.

Internally, we carried out an assessment of our delivery of the HRB Strategy 2016–2020 and took account of the lessons learned. We carried out extensive stakeholder engagement and convened the International Expert Advisory Panel of 12 of our peers who met in Dublin for three days – all of which provided invaluable input to the HRB Strategy 2021–2025 development process. The emerging strategic themes were robustly debated by the Board, management and staff throughout the process, thereby resulting in the strategic direction for the HRB’s next phase set out in this document. The key activities in the HRB Strategy 2021–2025 development process are summarised below and shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Key activities in the HRB Strategy 2021–2025 development process.

## **Review of the HRB Strategy 2016–2020**

The HRB management team undertook a self-assessment of the HRB's delivery of the HRB Strategy 2016–2020 up to September 2019 in order to determine lessons learned. These lessons were considered by the Board, executive team and the International Expert Advisory Panel, and informed the development of the current strategy, which covers the period 2021–2025.

## **Contextual and environmental review**

The HRB conducted an assessment of the external environment using PESTLE methodology – a framework used to analyse the key external factors (political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental) influencing an organisation. The exercise assessed the current external environment (nationally and internationally) in the context of health and health/social care research and identified significant changes that have occurred in the political/policy, economic, societal, technological, legal or environmental domains since the previous HRB Strategy, *Research Evidence Action*, was developed in 2015.

## **Stakeholder engagement process**

The HRB engaged in extensive stakeholder consultations involving surveys, one-on-one meetings and a series of workshops that canvassed the views of more than 400 stakeholders. The outputs from each consultation were carefully synthesised and consolidated. Following an extensive visioning process with the Board, management team and staff representatives, a number of strategic themes emerged.

## **International Expert Advisory Panel**

To build on the stakeholder engagement and harness international expertise, the HRB appointed a 12-member International Expert Advisory Panel. The terms of reference for the Panel were to:

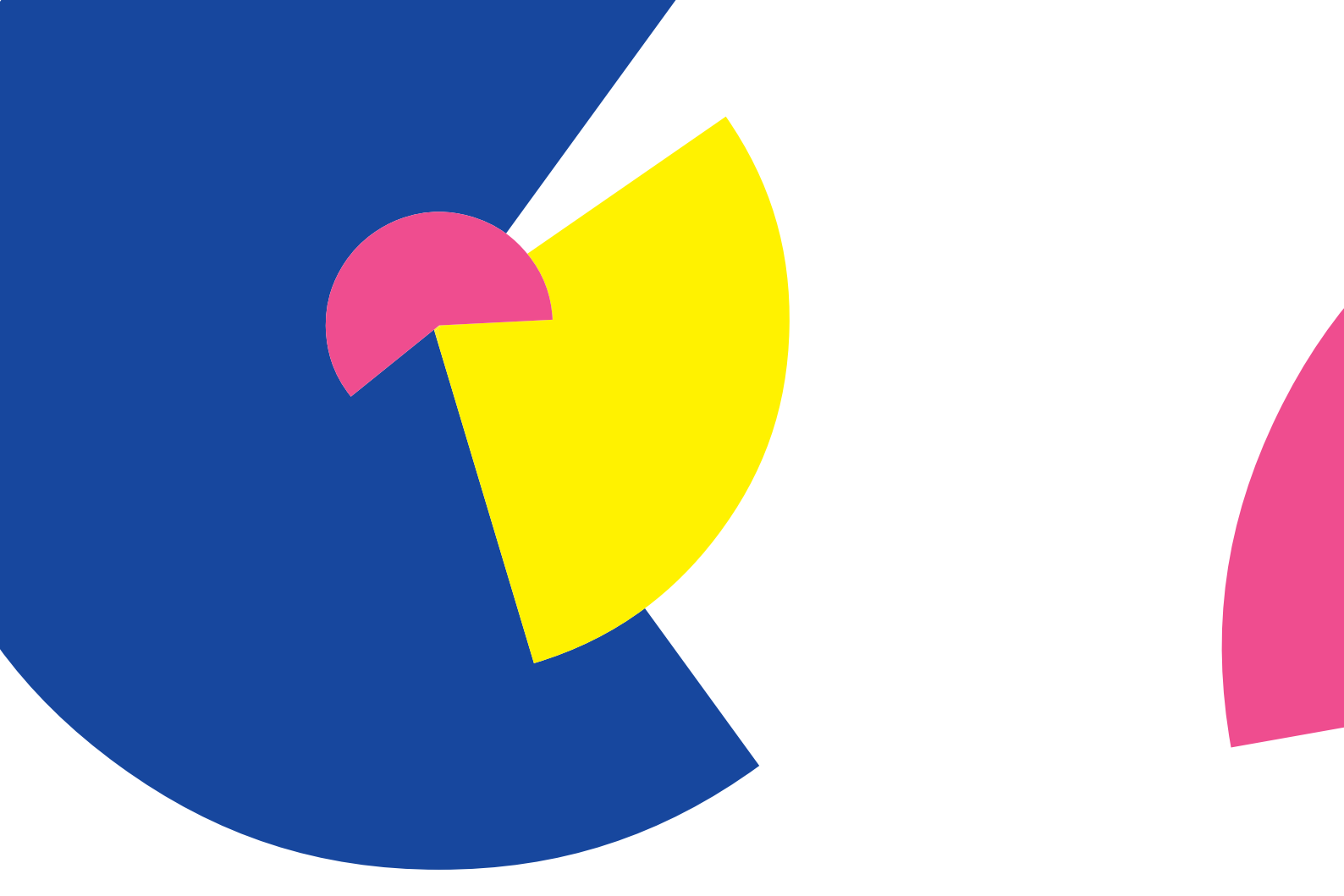
- Evaluate the HRB's delivery against the HRB Strategy 2016–2020.
- Advise on the potential direction of the new Strategy, in the context of the stakeholder consultation, the Irish health research system and other information provided by the HRB, as well as bringing their own expertise and international perspectives.
- Make recommendations around potential new strategic focus areas for the HRB Strategy 2021–2025.

Following extensive pre-briefing, the International Expert Advisory Panel met for three days in October 2019 at the HRB offices in Dublin. Throughout the event, the Panel was joined by members of the HRB senior management team and two Board representatives. The full HRB Board and representatives from the Department of Health's R&D and Health Informatics Directorate joined the Panel for separate sessions on day two of the event. Over the course of the meeting, the Panel took account of all documentation provided, considered all stakeholder inputs, and shared their global expertise on key health and social care research areas. On the final day, the Panel recommended nine potential future strategic themes for consideration, which helped to shape the HRB Strategy 2021–2025.

# Notes

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