HRB Statement of Strategy 2026–2030

Consultation document

Introduction

The Health Research Board (HRB) is the lead national agency for funding and conducting health and social care research in Ireland. A major agency of the Department of Health, we are committed to delivering better health and care through excellent research, evidence and data. The research we fund and the data, evidence and services generated are central to improving people’s health and wellbeing and transforming the national health and social care system.

Over the past five years, the HRB has grown in scale and ambition, investing more than €250m in health research projects and clinical trials infrastructure, leveraging an additional €264m and supporting more than 600 skilled research posts. As well as making real differences to improving health and care outcomes for our population, HRB investment is improving productivity, through research, across the health and care system and across our wider economy.

As a result of our work, research has been integrated into national policies and strategies, notably in areas such as mental health, cancer, palliative care, genomics, rare diseases and drugs, and has influenced key public health legislation and policy such as the Public Health Alcohol Act, the Gambling Regulation Act, and Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act.

We have been actively involved in advancing the implementation of the European Health Data Space Regulation, supporting the Department of Health as they develop the Health Information Bill and publishing a proof of concept for a data access and linkage model to inform the design of a Health Data Access Body. We have also played a lead role in research governance, ethics and data safeguards through the work of the National Office for Research Ethics Committees and the Secretariat for the Health Research Consent Declaration Committee (HRCDC).

By promoting public and patient involvement in research and the work we do, we strive to ensure that our actions are informed by the lived experience of people who are affected by the issues the research is trying to address.

The current HRB Strategy spans 2020-2025 and earlier this year, the Board initiated a programme of work that included horizon scanning, desk-based analysis, staff workshops and stakeholder engagement to inform and support planning for our next Strategy (2026-2030). This started with a dedicated focus on strategy at our Grant Holders Conference in February. Since then, we have conducted a series of meetings with a wide range of stakeholders and recognising the importance of the voice of the public, patients and people with lived experience, we established and sought feedback from a public and patient reference group.

We are now seeking the views of our stakeholders and invite you to provide your feedback through our online questionnaire which sets out the key questions we would like you to address. The deadline for completing the survey is **Friday 5 December** at noon.

Values

Our values reflect and shape our culture and underpin everything we do.

Impact: We are committed to making a positive impact on people's health through research, policy and the public good.

Inclusiveness and respect: We work collaboratively to ensure that everyone's views are heard and respected.

Enthusiasm and pride: We support a culture where people are enthusiastic and take pride in their work.

Leadership: We take a leadership role to advance health and social care through research.

Integrity: We are ethical and transparent in our work to maintain public trust.

Innovation and agility: We embrace new challenges and opportunities and are responsive to change.

Equity: We work to promote health equity and address health inequalities across various dimensions, including socioeconomic status, age, gender, and disability.

Sustainability: We actively promote sustainable practices to minimise our impact on the environment.

Vision

Our vision is to lead a dynamic health research ecosystem in Ireland that delivers better health and social care for everyone.

Mission

Our mission is to support and invest in excellent research and generate high-quality data and evidence that informs policy and practice and improves people's health.

Strategic goals

We have set out strategic objectives for 2026-2030 under five goals:

GOAL 1 Create a thriving health research environment

Creating a vibrant and future-ready environment and research workforce for health and social care

GOAL 2 Advance Ireland’s clinical trial ecosystem

Building an effective and competitive clinical trials ecosystem in Ireland that delivers for patients, the healthcare system and the economy

GOAL 3 Generate and support evidence for policy and practice

Informing health policy and practice through high-quality data and evidence

GOAL 4 Invest in innovative research ideas

Funding the best research, ideas and innovations to improve health and social care and support the economy

GOAL 5 Lead for impact through strategic research partnerships

Driving national, EU and international collaboration to tackle health challenges, ensure ethical practices in research and innovation and enable successful participation in EU funding programmes

To achieve our mission, activities within and across goals are co-dependent, are interwoven and reinforce each other.

GOAL 1 Create a thriving health research environment

Creating a vibrant and future-ready environment and research workforce for health and social care

We will build and support a strong research workforce to meet national, global and future health and social care needs by:

- Supporting the next generation of applied health and social care researchers, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches.
- Providing opportunities for health and social care professionals at all stages of their careers to combine research training and practice.
- Investing in academic-based health and social care research with the potential for impact on policy and practice.
- Building capacity and capability in critical areas such as data science and biostatistics.
- Investing in established and future leaders in health research, with a particular focus on growing a research-active, clinical-academic workforce.

We will promote and enable access to research platforms and infrastructures that will enable and enhance health research and innovation by:

- Building awareness of and supporting the advancement of a national Health Data Access Body under the European Health Data Space (EHDS) which will enable secure access, linkage and use of health data for research and innovation purposes.
- Boosting genomic data infrastructure, aligned with the 1 million genome project (1+MG) and EHDS, to advance research in genomics and personalised medicine for patients and the healthcare system.
- Working with the Department of Health and other partners across the island of Ireland to advance a harmonised approach to biobanking.
- Promoting the establishment of, and use of a European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) node in Ireland, to provide researchers with an open and trusted multi-disciplinary environment where they can publish, find and reuse data, tools and services for research and innovation.

We will drive excellence in our health research funding policies and practices and support a healthy research and innovation culture by:

- Embedding responsible research assessment practices that promote excellence, integrity and a healthy research and innovation culture, and share our work in this area.
- Supporting FAIR principles and the transition to open access and open data through collaboration and alignment with national and international partners.
- Employing research processes and technological systems that are modern, efficient and reduce administrative burden and waste.

- Working with national and international partners to influence, shape, implement and evaluate evolving research policy agendas (such as research security and the responsible use of AI in science).

We will support research conducted in Ireland to be ethical, safeguarded and in the best interest of research participants and the public by:

- Enabling research conducted in the public interest through implementation of regulation and data protection safeguards through the Health Research Consent Declaration Committee (HRCDC) supported by the Secretariat.
- Supporting the National Research Ethics Committees (NRECs) to deliver robust national research ethics opinions for clinical research on medicines, medical devices and diagnostics, underpinned by diverse and wide-ranging expertise and experiential knowledge.
- Developing agile procedures to respond to health emergencies and emerging threats, and to support the NRECs and HRCDC to deliver accelerated national decisions on ethics and consent, in accordance with national and international guidelines.
- Developing trusted, expert-driven, national best practice guidance on ethics, consent and regulations to support researchers to conduct safe and ethical research.
- Ensuring transparency of the work of HRCDC and NRECs which uphold the highest standards of research ethics, governance and data protection safeguards in the best interest of research participants and the public.
- Promoting the necessity of Patient and Public Involvement in research ethics, consent safeguards and health research more broadly, through engagement with national organisations and PPI members of the HRCDC and NRECs.

GOAL 2 Advance Ireland’s clinical trial ecosystem

Building an effective and competitive clinical trials ecosystem in Ireland that delivers for patients, the healthcare system and the economy

We will work with partners to build on the existing foundation to create a competitive, effective clinical trials ecosystem that delivers for patients, the healthcare system and the economy by:

- Working with the Department of Health and other government departments and agencies under the auspices of the Clinical Trials Advisory Council (CTAC), once established, to co-invest in infrastructure supports for trial conduct and delivery, based on scientific excellence, to increase the number and quality of clinical trials in Ireland.
- Enhancing the capabilities and capacity of researchers across the health and social care system in the design, conduct, oversight and reporting of investigator initiated clinical trials and interventions.
- Supporting the advancement of high-quality, multicentre clinical trials through research networks in priority areas.

- Working with the CTAC to support the establishment of a national portal for metrics and a dashboard reporting system for clinical trials, so that key performance indicators are consistent across the ecosystem.

We will Increase the number and quality of clinical trials in Ireland by:

- Increasing funding for high-quality investigator-initiated clinical trials across all intervention types.
- Working with European and International partners to fund multinational investigator-initiated trials.
- Advancing clinical trial participation and standards through active involvement in the European Clinical Research Infrastructure Network (ECRIN).
- Promoting policies and practices that reduce research waste, improve trial informativeness, enhance transparent and timely reporting and enable public and patient involvement and diversity and inclusion in trials.
- Promoting a pre-submission consultation service to support the research community in navigating the submission requirements for national ethics opinions and consent declarations decision, that will drive quality and efficiency for research studies commencing in Ireland
- Contributing to the Accelerating Clinical Trials in the EU (ACT EU) initiative, supporting the implementation of the Clinical Trials Regulations and the Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS) for an effective clinical trials system nationally and across the EU.

We will advance a robust, transparent and dynamic national research ethics review system for regulated clinical research areas

- Continuing to enable the delivery of a single national ethics opinion for regulated clinical research through the work of the National Office and the NRECs it supports
- Working with the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), to deliver trusted coordinated national decisions for clinical research on medicines, medical devices and diagnostics within the prescribed EU regulated timelines
- Developing a framework to deliver a coordinated national assessment for multi-country studies that combine medicines, medical devices and diagnostics in collaboration with the HPRA and the NRECs.

GOAL 3 Generate and support evidence for policy and practice

Informing health policy and practice through high-quality data and evidence

We will build/refine our health information infrastructure to support health and social care policy, service planning and practice by:

- Expanding the HRB's national health information systems' specialist areas and associated research activity in collaboration with our key stakeholders to ensure it is used as evidence to support policy and service planning.
- Establishing the HRB as a trusted data holder as part of the EHDS with the technical capability for secure processing and innovative statistical techniques and AI to enable access to and linkage of data for secondary research purposes.
- Working with the DOH and the HSE, in the context of the *Digital for Care: A digital health framework for Ireland 2024-2030* to support initiatives like Community Connect to ensure the digitisation of data in community-based health and social care services.

We will leverage evidence synthesis as a tool for evidence-informed decision making in health and social care by:

- Providing a dedicated evidence centre with a national drugs library and alcohol and drugs research programme, to generate evidence products for the Department of Health, the HSE and other government departments and agencies.
- Supporting, strengthening and connecting the evidence synthesis community on the island of Ireland and raising awareness of evidence synthesis among the public, health care institutions and policymakers.
- Investing in evidence synthesis methods and budget impact analysis to inform the development of prioritised National Clinical Guidelines.
- Establishing an evidence synthesis hub to provide relevant and timely synthesised research evidence for decision makers during preparedness and response phases for emerging public health threats.
- Working in partnership with international funders and networks to advance the safe and responsible use of AI-enabled tools and open data systems that support living evidence syntheses.

We will fund high quality research that delivers robust, relevant, timely, accessible and actionable evidence in areas prioritised by policymakers by:

- Working with the Department of Health to solicit, fund and manage projects through the Evidence for Policy Research Programme (and other mechanisms as required).
- Convening a national mirror group in health services, systems and policy research to input into research topics for the Transforming Health and Care Systems partnership and to support the transfer of findings into policy and practice.

- Harnessing the power of prospective longitudinal studies for policymaking in health and social care.
- Promoting cross-sectoral collaboration and whole-of-Government evidence-for-policy initiatives.

We will promote and facilitate engagement and interaction between researchers and decision makers to bridge the research-policy gap by:

- Building awareness of the policymaking process amongst researchers and provide guidance on how to apply it to their research.
- Providing supports to policy makers to identify and prioritise evidence gaps and to translate these into research questions.
- Building capacity in critical appraisal skills amongst decision makers in health and social care to enable them to assess the trustworthiness, quality and relevance of evidence used in decision making in particular contexts.
- Facilitating and supporting innovative knowledge brokerage activities between the policymaking community and evidence producers to build long term connections and relationships and to optimise the translation and adoption of evidence.

Goal 4 Invest in innovative research ideas

Funding the best research, ideas and innovations to improve health and social care and support the economy

We will support innovative, investigator-initiated (clinical, population health and health services/systems) research by:

- Funding the best ideas and innovations proposed by researchers, ensuring that we invest in excellent research that has an impact on health outcomes, society and the economy.
- Implementing initiatives to promote and leverage the use of secondary data, AI and big data analytics to enhance research and innovation in health and social care.
- Exploring initiatives that build on recent national investments in genomics capabilities and infrastructure to advance world-leading genomics research that improves human health.
- Embracing collaborations with national and international funders that enable larger and more ambitious projects and/or bridge gaps across funders and the research continuum from discovery to practice (and back again).

We will support health research focused on high-priority areas positioned for impact by:

- Expanding our investments with the health sector, including the Department of Health, HSE and health research charities to advance excellent and innovative research in areas of importance and priority, such as healthy ageing, mental health, workforce and capacity and prevention of disease.

- Working with the Department of Health, the HSE and other agencies to ensure that a joined-up and responsive 'One health' approach to research and evidence is advanced as part of a sustainable and ongoing health threats preparedness and response programme.
- Working across agencies and sectors to support research that addresses the wider determinants of health that contribute to poorer health outcomes.
- Supporting collaborative research networks to coalesce around important problems to exchange information, advance research and accelerate findings into policy and practice settings.

We will strengthen, evaluate and communicate the impact of HRB-funded research by:

- Continuing to play a leadership role in advancing innovative public and patient involvement initiatives and embed meaningful and impactful public and patient involvement in research at multiple levels.
- Developing an outcomes framework to assess progress across our funding portfolio and deliver an evaluation programme that provides robust evidence for decision-making, accountability and communication.
- Supporting HRB-funded researchers to promote and disseminate their research.
- Producing reports and case studies to provide information about HRB-funded research outputs, outcomes and impact.

GOAL 5 Lead for impact through strategic research partnerships

Driving national, EU and international collaboration to tackle health challenges, ensure ethical practices in research and innovation and enable successful participation in EU funding programmes

We will work with Government partners to drive a globally competitive research and innovation ecosystem in Ireland by:

- Working with Government departments and agencies to support the delivery of shared goals and to drive key agendas in *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy*.
- Ensuring that our investments contribute to the advancement of wider government objectives, for example, those included in the Programme for Government, the National Development Plan and the National Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity.
- Supporting the development of Life Sciences strategy in Ireland and work with others to unlock the full potential for patients, the healthcare system and the economy.
- Collaborating with the Department of Health to explore developing an effective and agile national research ethics system for non-regulated and multi-site research, and research areas of national strategic importance, through the advancement of the NREC Bill 2019.
- Working with the Department of Health, the Data Protection Commission and other stakeholders to holistically review all national health research legislation, including Health Research

Regulations, and ensure its relevance and future-readiness, for researchers, patients and the public.

We will drive all-island collaboration in health research and innovation by:

- Working with funders and other partners in Northern Ireland to advance an all-island approach to research and innovation, with tangible benefits for patients, communities and healthcare delivery systems.
- Exploring opportunities with partners in the UK Research &Innovation system to progress targeted and impactful investments in health research.

We will support the Irish health research community, policymakers and service delivery counterparts to compete in EU funding programmes by:

- Continuing to perform the National Delegate role for health within the Horizon Europe programme, working as part of the National Support Network and with delegates from other Member States to influence work programmes for health research within the wider Horizon Europe research agenda.
- Creating awareness and providing support to the Irish research community to participate in the Horizon Europe funding programme.
- Raising awareness and providing support to policymakers, service delivery counterparts and researchers to participate in the EU4Health Programme.

We will co-fund with European (Commission) partners to collectively tackle some of Europe's most pressing challenges:

- Supporting Ireland's participation in flagship health-related EU Partnerships to advance strategic research and innovation agendas, including: Rare Diseases (ERDERA), Pandemic Preparedness (BE READY NOW), OneHealth Antimicrobial resistance (OHAMR), Transforming Health and Care Systems (THCS), Personalised Medicines (PERMED), Fostering a European Research Area for Health Research (ERA4Health) and Brain Health
- Supporting research into drug use and related harms in collaboration with the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA).

We will work with our national and European partners to drive harmonised, best ethical practices for regulated research, and all health and social care sectors by:

- Implementing harmonised EU regulations nationally, for a predictable and effective national ethics system for research on medicines, medical devices and diagnostics, by working with EU Member States and through our participation on MedEthicsEU, the Clinical Trials Coordination Group, and Medical Devices Coordination Group.
- Working collaboratively with European bodies such as European Network for Research Ethics Committee and National Ethics Councils to develop and share best ethics practices and knowledge across all sectors, beyond health research.