

The People's Priorities - Summary

The Patient and Client Council is pleased to present the "People's Priorities". This is a report of our engagement with almost 1,000 people across Northern Ireland regarding their perspectives on future priorities for health and social care. The purpose of this report is to ensure that the process of setting future targets for health and social care reflects the opinions of people who use the services.

The Patient and Client Council believes that there has never been a more important time for people to have a say in the future of their public services. The fact that so many people took time to give their views is a testimony to the interest they have in the future of health and social care services

There are important messages in this report for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; and, key decision makers.. The report makes it clear that people support the setting of targets and welcome the improvements in service delivery which have come about as a result of these targets. However, they are concerned about issues such as protecting the numbers of "front line" staff, increasing waiting times, care of the elderly (particularly domiciliary care), and, mental health and learning disability services.

The report shows that most people are unaware of the "Priorities for Action" targets. However, once these were explained to them, participants expressed a desire for the public to be better informed about the targets, and, the performance of the Health and Social Care Trusts in achieving those targets.

Each individual was asked to suggest three priorities. This generated approximately 1,700 responses. Of these responses two thirds (1,151) were represented in the top ten priorities. The top ten priorities identified by both individuals and groups were as follows:

1. the protection of front line staff – particularly nurses;
2. dealing with increasing waiting times for hospital inpatients, outpatients, diagnostics, and GP appointments;
3. care of the elderly including domiciliary care;
4. developing appropriate mental health and learning disability services;
5. the need to secure public funding for health and social care;
6. access to local services including Accident & Emergency and outpatients services;
7. access to, and quality of, GP services;
8. access to, and quality of, cancer care;
9. improving the quality of communication between staff and patients/service users; and,
10. the rising costs of prescription drugs.

Almost three quarters of people felt that targets were important to the delivery of health and social care. In particular they felt that targets provide a goal, a focus or a standard against which services must be delivered. They expressed the view that targets have improved the efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability within health and social care services. They particularly value the reduction in waiting times in recent years.

Some people felt that there was potential for targets to become the focus of delivering services rather than the quality of outcomes for patients and service users; and, for targets to put undue pressure on front line staff, particularly doctors. Some people felt that targets may be counter productive and that valuable resources are required to monitor them.

The report makes a number of recommendations to the Department and key decision makers. It will also play a significant part in the development of the 2011/12 work plan for the Patient and Client Council.