

Written Ministerial Statement

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Health

All-island Congenital Heart Disease Network

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Mrs Michelle O’Neill (The Minister of Health): This statement is to bring Members’ attention to the attached Joint Ministerial Statement issued today by Simon Harris TD, Minister for Health in the South, and me, announcing new investment in the All-island Congenital Heart Disease Network to support the full development and embedding of this important service.

Draft Joint Policy Statement by the Ministers of Health, Simon Harris TD and Michelle O’Neill MLA, on the All-island Congenital Heart Disease Network

In March 2015 our respective Departments confirmed that they would establish an All-island Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) Clinical Network from 1 April 2015. This followed the outcome of a public consultation in the North on the International Working Group’s (IWG) recommendations published by both Departments in October 2014. The Network is comprised of an All-island Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) Clinical Network Board and a Cross-Jurisdictional Oversight Group

The initial Action Plan to be implemented by the Network Board committed to a phased introduction of the Network. In this respect the Network Board has produced a Vision Statement and put forward a Full Business Case for the necessary investment, which sets out a detailed plan to deliver the implementation targets set out in the Joint Policy Statement on 14 October 2014. Having given these our full consideration, we are pleased to announce that we are fully committed to the Network Board’s Vision for the All-island Congenital Heart Disease Network which is: “To establish a world class family-centric congenital heart disease service for the island of Ireland.”

We recognise that the realisation of this vision requires a number of essential developments, such as the expansion of Intensive Care capacity in our Lady’s Children’s Hospital Crumlin (OLCHC) and the associated requirement for additional medical and nursing staff; the development of a Specialist Children’s Cardiology Centre in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; further development of a number of regional children’s cardiology centres across the island and training in CHD for all health professionals in the network, with associated opportunities to move within the network to develop competencies. To further underpin the development of an innovative service, formal links will be established with an appropriate Academic establishment and supported by a research and innovation fund. Over the next 5 years, approximately €57 million / £42 million will be invested between our two jurisdictions to support these developments.

The Business Case endorsed by the CHD Network Board envisages completing the phased implementation of the transfer of all urgent surgical cases from the North (in addition to the Emergency cases currently being transferred) to OLCHC between now and the end of 2017 and all elective surgical cases by the end of 2018. In the interim the Belfast Trust will continue to operate a service

level agreement with OLCHC to provide emergency surgical treatment in OLCHC for Northern patients.

The immediate focus of the Network Board has been to ensure that children currently transferred from the North for treatment at specialist surgical centres in England receive their treatment in future at OLCHC as soon as possible. However, the remit of the Board is to build a world class CHD service for all of the children and young people in the island who have a congenital heart condition.

We are therefore pleased to announce that the Network will, in the near future, expand the capacity for catheterisation procedures in the newly opened, state of the art Hybrid Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratory at OLCHC, as a result of the investment we have announced today. This will create an All-island Catheterisation Waiting List, to the benefit of children across the island. This will be the first All-island waiting list of its kind.

Taken together, the joint investment we are announcing today to expand surgical and catheterisation capacity at OLCHC clearly demonstrates the potential of North-South collaboration on healthcare to bring tangible benefits and outcomes for patients across Ireland. The Network has also overseen good progress in terms of improving telemedicine and image exchange links between Dublin and Belfast, improving the rate of antenatal detection of congenital cardiac conditions, improving the experience of young people transitioning into adult settings for their care, upgrading equipment used to monitor babies' hearts, and expanding ambulance provision for the transfer of children between heart centres. Recognising the progress and benefits of such developments, we wish to announce that we will be tasking officials with carrying out a scoping study to identify further areas of co-operation in health and social care across the island of Ireland.

We wish to thank Dr Len O'Hagan, Chair of the Network Board, and his colleagues on the Network Board for their dedicated efforts over the past year in carrying out the necessary detailed planning to move forward the ambitious plan for an All-island CHD Network which our predecessors confirmed in March 2015. We pay tribute to the patient representative organisations, both for their continued support of heart families across the island of Ireland, and for their significant contribution to the development of the Network. Finally, we wish to record our gratitude to the clinical, nursing and administrative staff who are dedicated to providing high quality treatment and care for CHD patients.

We close by reaffirming the commitment of our respective Departments to the provision of an optimal service, with the critical mass to provide safe high quality outcomes for congenital cardiac surgery and associated cardiology services for all children and young people in Ireland, as the goal of all of the work described above. At the centre of this is our clear aim to support and meet the needs of these vulnerable children, young people and their families.