

# The State of Play

## An All Island Approach

Summary discussion and recommendations arising from an all island seminar held in Daisy Lodge, Newcastle, Co. Down on January 25th 2024.



### Policy



#### NORTHERN IRELAND

Currently no policy document in NI for hospital play or health play specialists. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, its importance and the role of play specialists was prominent in policy documents.

#### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Role of play in hospital was significant in the 2004 National Play Policy, 'Ready Steady Play'. A new play policy is expected to be drafted in 2025 - it is unclear at this time if play in hospital is to be included.



### General

Health Play Specialists help children mitigate the fear, anxiety, trauma and isolation often associated with medical procedures and hospital stays. They achieve this through the medium of play. This can be particularly important for those with serious, chronic, or terminal illnesses, or those with emergency admissions.

#### PREVALENCE

1/10 adults who attended hospital regularly as a child report mental health issues in adulthood associated with the experience.

#### TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

TIC is a new medical approach gaining traction globally - play specialists are an important part of this approach.

#### PLAY THERAPIST VS PLAY SPECIALIST

A Play Therapist helps any child with an identified well-being issue. A Health Play Specialist helps a child receiving a health care intervention and tries to mitigate a well-being issue (typically trauma and/or anxiety) arising from the experience.



### Education

#### DEGREE COURSE

A foundation degree in Health Play Specialism is essential. There is no degree course available on the island of Ireland.



### Volunteers

#### VOLUNTEER NETWORKS

Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting play specialists in ROI. This is managed by Children in Hospital Ireland. There is no equivalent charity in NI and as such no volunteer network in NI.



### Regulation

#### REGULATORY BODY

There is no regulatory body in ROI or NI. However, it is strongly encouraged across both jurisdictions to register with the Health Play Specialist Education Trust (HPSET).



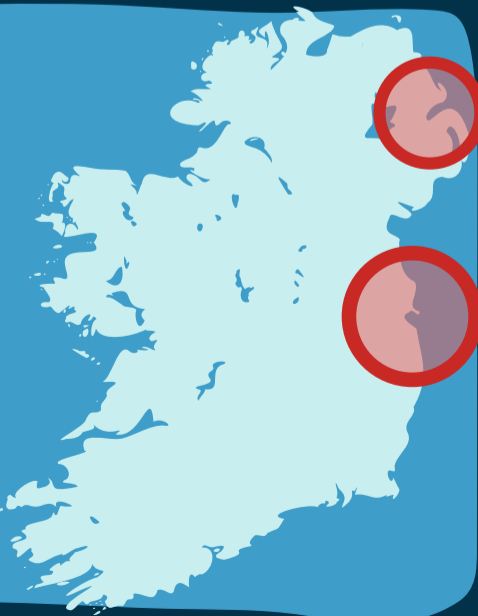
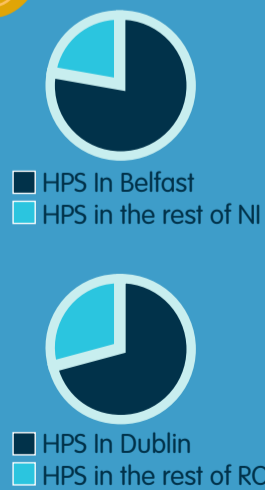
### Provision

#### NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH PLAY SPECIALISTS

26 HPS in NI - 21 in Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

#### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND HEALTH PLAY SPECIALISTS

38 HPS in ROI, in a combination of full and part time positions. 27 of these are in the 4 National Childrens Hospital's in Dublin. There are 11 HPS in 8 regional hospitals with children's wards, an increase of only two across the regional hospitals since the figures reported in 2004 National Play Policy. There remain 9 regional and specialist hospitals with children's wards with no HPS.



### Research and Collaboration

#### DRIVING CHANGE

There is opportunity for Health Play Specialists in ROI and NI to work together to drive change. The Taskforce on Children's Play in Healthcare in England, a partnership between NHS England, Starlight, HPSET and other stakeholders, is a collaboration to emulate.



### Recommendations

1. Galvanise the wealth of knowledge amongst Health Play Specialists in NI and ROI, and together with stakeholders, drive change.
2. Ensure availability of degree level education on island of Ireland.
3. Increase the policy commitment to play in hospital at government level in both jurisdictions.

