



# inspire

wellbeing, ability, recovery

# Delivering Wellbeing For All

Inspire's manifesto for the Northern Ireland  
Assembly election 2022



# Inspire at a glance

Inspire is an all-island charity and social enterprise and our aim is wellbeing for all. We work together with people living with mental ill health, intellectual disability, autism and addictions, ensuring that they live with dignity and realise their full potential. We campaign to create a society free from stigma and discrimination, one with a culture of compassion that focuses on people and their abilities. Our services include:

## **Mental health and addiction care and support services**

Our mental health and addiction services focus on inclusion by providing recovery-based support in communities

## **Intellectual disability and autism care and support services**

Our intellectual disability and autism services are built around those we support and empower people to live independently, as part of their communities.

## **Therapeutic and wellbeing services**

Our therapeutic and wellbeing services provide a range of wellbeing support services, training and interventions, which help organisations, employees and students to thrive.

## **Insight, Engagement and Innovation**

Our Insight, Engagement and Innovation team aims to amplify the voices of the people we support to inform and shape wider society through campaigning, research and the development of new services.



Over  
**25,000**  
people use our  
services

We provide our  
services in  
**67 sites**  
across Ireland

**840**  
people work for  
Team Inspire

For more information, visit our website  
[www.inspirewellbeing.org](http://www.inspirewellbeing.org)

# #WillYou22

This manifesto has been developed in full partnership with the people who use Inspire's services and provides a comprehensive overview of the things that matter to them. We are very lucky to have an active and politically engaged Service User Reference Forum, which distilled these issues into 10 key questions for candidates, elected representatives and political parties.

## #WillYou22

1. Will you commit to producing a three-year budget as a matter of priority?
2. Will you commit to full implementation and funding of the 10-year mental health strategy?
3. How will you ensure that the voice of lived experience is valued by decision-makers and informs and shapes policy and practice across the region?
4. How will you ensure that people living with mental ill health are aware of their human rights and have these rights recognised and respected in decisions relating to their care and support?
5. How will you work to end stigma against people living with mental ill health, addictions and/or intellectual disability?
6. How will you ensure that mental health awareness is embedded across the public sector and will you commit to mental health awareness training for you, your staff and your party colleagues?
7. How will you tackle the cost-of-living crisis, which is affecting the wellbeing of people, families and communities across the region?
8. How will you ensure that the social security system is made fit for purpose for people living with mental ill health, addictions and/or intellectual disability?
9. How will you ensure that people living with mental ill health, addictions and/or intellectual disability have access to suitable support and housing, allowing them to live independently in communities of their choice?
10. Will you commit to ensuring that no child is left behind by our education system and that children are supported to thrive physically, emotionally and academically?

# Why this election is so important

The upcoming Northern Ireland Assembly election is a pivotal one. It takes place against a backdrop in which wellbeing, perhaps more than ever before, is a live public health concern, engaging citizens and their elected representatives alike.

Mental health has, of course, become a particularly prominent topic since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even as the large-scale risks of the virus hopefully begin to fade, we will all, in multiple ways, feel the effects of this once-in-a-century public health crisis for years to come. There is also a considerable body of evidence, which documents the lasting psychological impact of the Troubles and the ongoing harm caused by the deep divisions in our society.

This is why the election is so important. It is during the next Assembly mandate that the Northern Ireland Executive will effect a suite of proposals introduced during the previous one, from the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 to the much-needed Substance Use Strategy. These reforms – and others – are central to our efforts to move beyond both Covid-19 and the legacy of the past and towards building a better, more resilient community.

This document, **Delivering Wellbeing For All**, is Inspire's manifesto for the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election. The themes and quotes throughout have emerged from conversations with our service users and the colleagues who support them. The list of asks below is an illustration of how wellbeing and positive mental health stem from a holistic approach to policy-making.

We have divided these recommendations into four categories: health, economy, society and environment. Inspire is, after all, a reflection of its people and while they are rightly concerned with policies around mental health, addiction and intellectual disability, the individuals we support are not defined by the conditions with which they live.

They have told us that the key components of public wellbeing include a home, an income and a connection with family, friends and community. The Department for Communities, therefore, occupies a clear and critical role. Meanwhile, the Department of Education has its own part to play in focusing attention on early intervention and prevention.



Access to services, transport and public spaces are significant contributors to wellbeing and recovery, too. Therefore, the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs are leading actors. Supported employment and skills require the involvement of the Department for the Economy. Elsewhere, the commissioning of services and overall budget share for mental health requires input from the Department of Finance. Matters relating to addiction, public safety and criminality fall within the purview of the Department of Justice.

As our manifesto demonstrates, the people who use Inspire's services are integral members of their communities, with families and jobs, hopes and dreams. They require a safety net, just like the rest of us, and aspire to a home and a future.

This is what they want from the Northern Ireland Executive.



# Health

Statistics published this year by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency show a 39% increase in drug-related deaths, with residents of the most deprived areas now five times more likely to die than their counterparts in the least deprived neighbourhoods. This illustrates the **widening health inequalities across the region**. It also confirms the changing patterns and methods of consumption, highlighting the increased prevalence of poly-substance use, opioid drugs (such as heroin) and prescribed medication.

**“Mental health and physical health should be treated equally.”**

In 2019, Inspire and Change Your Mind, Northern Ireland’s anti-stigma campaign, commissioned a major poll on attitudes to addiction. Encouragingly, the research illustrated sympathetic, nuanced perspectives. Over two-thirds of respondents believed in tolerant attitudes towards people with a history of drug and alcohol dependence and 86% agreed that individuals living with addiction should be part of the wider community.

Eight out of 10 thought that those addicted to alcohol and other drugs must be provided with the best possible care. An almost identical percentage agreed that anyone – regardless of age, gender or social class – can become dependent on any substance. Furthermore, a majority (58%) felt that the Northern Ireland Executive should address excessive use of alcohol and other drugs as a matter of priority. Meanwhile, 53% favoured the establishment of clinical facilities designed to help people use illegal drugs safely in Northern Ireland.

**“Mental health needs to be taken seriously, no broken promises. Invest in services now. We need the support. A price should not be put on a person’s mental wellbeing.”**

In general, anyone living with mental ill health, addiction issues or an intellectual disability is statistically more likely to die from an avoidable chronic medical condition. Inspire staff assist our service users in accessing the supports that aid their physical health. They often have to “fight for every appointment”, owing to stigma and the discriminatory practice of dismissing concerns as symptoms of mental ill health. Regrettably, service providers often see a diagnosis before they see a person.

**The connection between mental ill health, addiction and poverty has been firmly established.** Public health responses require cross-departmental measures to address Northern Ireland’s many social inequalities.

**We can address these challenges in the following ways:**

- The Department of Health’s **Mental Health Strategy** must be fully resourced and properly implemented. To move forward with all the actions in the Strategy, a 34% overall increase in the funding for Northern Ireland’s mental health services is needed .
- The implementation of the Mental Health Strategy and the delivery of a person-centred, needs-based regional mental health service and outcomes framework should include the **full integration of the community and voluntary sector**.
- **Crisis services** must be easily accessible to everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of where they live.
- **Specialist services** addressing complex needs, such as self-harm or eating disorders, need to be similarly designed. These will help people manage their conditions, work on recovery and live fulfilling lives.

- Access to services should be reviewed, so as to guarantee a **‘no wrong door’** approach to people availing of services for their mental health, their addictions or both. They should not have to decide for themselves which one to access first.
- There must be a **harm-reduction and recovery-based approach** to meet the needs of people living with addictions to alcohol and other drugs. A regional approach to mutual aid and peer support will promote recovery. Structured social support to help people stabilise their relationships, finances, housing and health underpins sustainable recovery. Consumption rooms, needle exchanges and naloxone provision form realistic, compassionate approaches to intravenous drug use.
- Everyone using or seeking to use services should be able to access all of the information and guidance they require, alongside comprehensive, independent advocacy, which protects and **champions their human rights**. This is especially the case for those transitioning into and out of services and between child and adolescent mental health services and adult and older people’s services.
- For Inspire, recovery means “living your best life, as defined by you, with or without your symptoms.” More attention and resources should be committed to ensuring that people living with mental ill health understand their diagnoses, **the options open to them and how best to manage their recovery**.
- **No person living with mental ill health, addictions or intellectual disability should die from preventable physical health conditions.** If we are truly to improve physical health outcomes, we need to invest in training and awareness-raising among professionals, such as general practitioners, dentists, opticians, medical-screening staff and public, sexual and reproductive health workers. We can support and advocate for people as they learn about the intersection between physical health, mental health and their particular treatment pathways.

**“Community services are saving people’s lives.”**

- By working together, the Northern Ireland Executive and community and voluntary sector can **end stigma** through public awareness campaigns and training for practitioners in health and social care. Mental health awareness should be embedded across the public sector and elected members, their staff and political parties can lead the way by committing to mental health awareness training.

**“There needs to be more priority given to supporting people’s self-understanding of their own conditions.”**



# Society

The people using our services are integral members of their communities, with families and jobs, hopes and dreams. From time to time, like anyone else, they require a safety net. They aspire to a home and a future. Mental health provision in Northern Ireland relies on thousands of unpaid – and often unseen – carers. We want **appropriate recognition for carers**, including for those who look after loved ones living with mental ill health and intellectual disabilities, along with new rights that protect and promote their interests.

**“We need to appropriately value the health and social care workforce.”**

It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people to **careers in social care**. Pay and conditions contribute greatly to this problem, with the salaries of support and project staff representing a major obstacle to building a labour force responsive to the present and the future.

**Social care support staff are key** to effecting real reform in the health system. They help people to live well in the community, thus freeing up spaces in hospitals and other settings, and improving the quality of life for all. However, this is often viewed as an add-on or a less important strand of our health and social care system. Before the voluntary and community sector can be properly integrated into a regional mental health service, staff must be fairly paid for the skilled and specialised work they do. Until this is properly addressed, social care will continue to face a dilemma in recruiting and retaining talent.

**“Put the necessary funding into improving mental health services in Derry. There are three bridges in this town and they have all taken lives.”**

**Here’s how we can provide solutions:**



- The Executive should provide comprehensive assessments, respite support and adequate financial **compensation for carers**.

**“No one should be refused from accessing mental health services because of their addiction.”**

- Social care staff should receive **improved terms and conditions**. Services should not be commissioned based on the lowest possible wage. Political representatives should lead the way in championing the role of social care in the health and social care system.
- **Suitable housing** for individuals living with mental ill health and intellectual disabilities is vital to maximising independent living and preventing unnecessary hospital stays. The Executive needs to guarantee such housing now and to cater for future needs, thereby enabling recovery-focused support, which allows people to stay well and live independently for as long as possible. This is why policies relating to mental health and housing must interact.
- **Raising the capacity and standards of in-patient care** is imperative. People who require in-patient treatment must be assured that it is there when they need it.
- Government must ensure that people living with mental ill health are aware of their **human rights**. These rights must be recognised and respected in the decisions that are made about their care and support.

# Economy

## Good mental health underpins so much.

According to new research by the Mental Health Foundation, mental ill health costs Northern Ireland's economy £3.4 billion every year. Almost 75% of that figure stems from lost productivity of people living with mental health conditions, as well as costs incurred by informal carers, who provide support in their communities.

**"The economic seesaw is incredibly unbalanced right now."**

Skills, education and employment are important to our service users. The European Social Fund provided many of the **vital retraining, job creation and skills development projects for people across Northern Ireland**. The loss of that funding could mean the end of learning programmes aimed at people living with mental ill health and intellectual disabilities.

## Poverty, austerity and the cost of living are having a real impact on mental health.

Rising fuel, energy, gas and food prices are forcing people and their families to make increasingly difficult choices. Changes to the social security system have also created genuine fear and anxiety. Almost without exception, people using our services have admitted to feeling worried about the transfer from disability living allowances to personal independence payments. Mental health and personal finances converge in two significant ways: changed circumstances when someone becomes ill and the impact a mental health condition can have on a person's ability to make sound financial decisions.

**"Benefit reviews for those with mental ill health need to be re-examined. I am made to feel like I am lying about my condition. I always feel sick around this time and my mental health deteriorates."**

## There are steps that we can take to deal with these issues:

- The Executive must make concerted public efforts to understand and highlight the **relationship between mental health and personal finances**, as well as helping those who are unwell to deal with the effect it has on their economic security.
- The Executive must continue to review and monitor all **welfare reform mitigations** in Northern Ireland and ensure that local people remain protected.
- The social security system must be **made fit for purpose** for people living with mental ill health, intellectual disability and addictions. Assessors, scoring criteria and documentation must be as reflective of these issues as they are of physical health conditions.
- An agreed **Executive Budget** is an indispensable element of long-term planning for a range of services in Northern Ireland. After the election, a newly formed Executive must commit to restarting immediately the consultation process for its proposed three-year Budget.
- Any new Budget should propose a permanent replacement for the areas of work and provision previously supported by the **European Social Fund**.
- The Executive must work to develop **job, training and employment opportunities** for people living with mental ill health, addiction and intellectual disabilities, enabling them to reach their potential, live independently and contribute to society.



# Environment

There is increasingly compelling evidence of the relationship between **environmental sustainability and positive mental health**.

**“Getting outside, going elsewhere and not being stuck at home is always going to be better for one’s mental health. Being allowed to pursue an activity is always going to be better for your mental health.”**

The UN Development Goals showcase the links between a clean atmosphere, renewable energy and overall wellbeing.

As the UN Environmental Programme notes, a person’s mental and emotional wellbeing can be affected, positively or negatively, by our planet’s changing climate. From economic uncertainty and job insecurity to extreme weather patterns and human displacement, **the natural world influences mental health** in a variety of ways.

Nature not only aids physical wellbeing but it can help everyone stay **mentally healthy**. Many of our service users have told us that when they get out into nature, they feel better and concentrate on looking after themselves and one another.

As people deal with the pressures of life, a simple activity like going for a walk means a change of scenery and some fresh air. Sitting somewhere peaceful eases anxieties or worries.

Even small contacts with nature **can reduce social isolation and prevent feelings of distress**. Whether they are living in rural or urban areas, everyone should have access to green spaces and bright futures.



**To look after the natural world, the Executive should:**

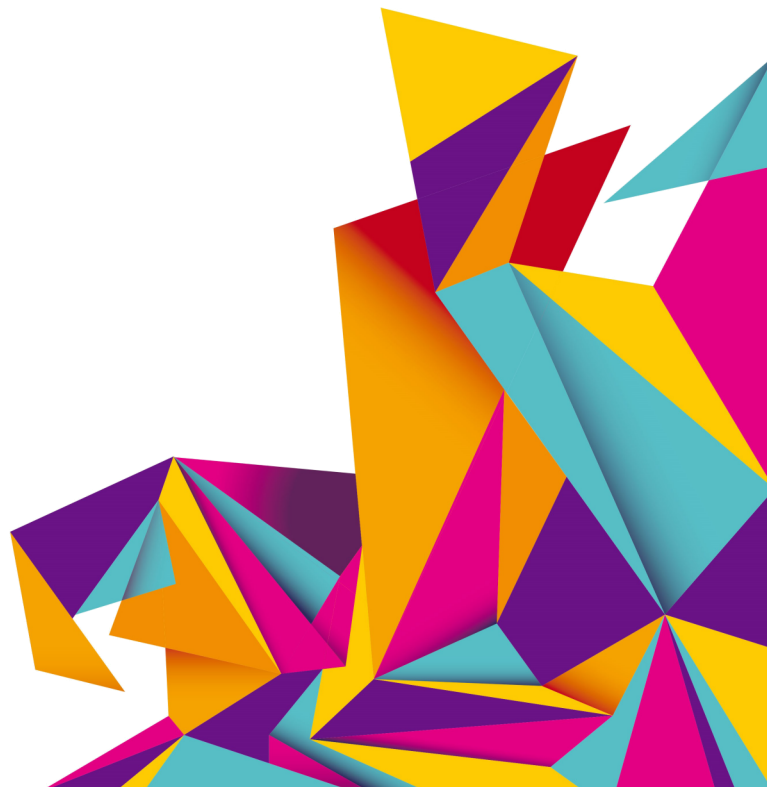
- Commit to **increasing routes and services for buses and trains**, while also making concrete commitments to expanding the rail network.
- Invest in **cultivating and protecting Northern Ireland’s green spaces**, as well as promoting the links between the natural environment and positive mental health.
- Pursue an **ambitious renewable energy policy** to complement existing climate change legislation. We need investment in better active travel infrastructure – including greenways, public bicycle hire schemes and dedicated cycling lanes – together with an expansion of the charging network for electric vehicles.

# Conclusion

The core of this manifesto is shaped by the individuals who make up Inspire: those who use our services and the staff supporting them. Their views, insights and lived experience continue to drive everything we do. They have entrusted us with the task of conveying their collective voice to the prospective legislators whose decisions will affect each of us, every day.

Inspire stands ready and willing to make our system work for the benefit of all. Our hope is that everyone reading this agrees with this aim. At the very least, our political parties and politicians might follow a simple piece of advice from one of Inspire's many service users:

**“Put your money where your heart is.”**





**inspire**

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## For more information

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