



National Traveller Health Action Plan Newsletter | Second edition





Welcome Message from Chair of the National Traveller Health Implementation Group...

I am pleased to welcome you to the second edition of the National Traveller Health Action Plan (NTHAP) newsletter. This edition provides updates on the progress made since summer 2024 and highlights the work of various stakeholders in delivery of NTHAP.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the success of the 30 Years of Primary Health Care for Travellers Conference, held in December and featured in this edition. The conference, organised as a partnership event between NTHIG, Pavee Point and the National Traveller Health Network was important in reflecting on and acknowledging the work of Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects and their contribution to addressing Traveller health inequalities. The event also focused on the future and continued development of PHCTPs as key pillar in working to improve Traveller health.

Again, thank you for your continued efforts and I look forward to working with you all in 2025.

Kindest Regards,

Aisling Heffernan

Chair of the National Traveller Health Implementation Group



Conference: 30 Years of Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects: Reflection, Celebration and Looking to the Future



A national conference celebrating 30 years of Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects (PHCTPs) took place in Croke Park on December 11, 2024. Organised by the HSE National Traveller Health Implementation Group, the National Traveller Health Network, and Pavee Point, the event reflected on the projects' achievements and focused on their future sustainability.

HSE CEO Bernard Gloster highlighted the unique contributions of PHCTP workers, saying, "You are of your community, from your community, and for your community." The conference featured discussions on the projects' history, the experiences of Traveller workers, and the challenges of advocating for their community amidst persistent racism and discrimination.

Key themes included the projects' critical role in addressing Traveller health issues, the need for interagency collaboration to tackle social determinants of health, and ensuring future sustainability through adequate resourcing and support.

Dr. Missie Collins shared her experiences as a founding member, recounting early challenges with the Eastern Health Board and ongoing work with Traveller families. Panel discussions involving workers, Travellers, and HSE staff highlighted the projects' flexibility, deep community ties, and success as a model for community development and peer-led education.

Martina Queally, HSE REO for Dublin and the South East, committed to working with her colleagues to sustain the projects.



Additionally, Brigid Quilligan, Manager of Kerry Traveller Health & Community Development Project underscored the importance of partnership between the Traveller community, PHCTPs, and the HSE. She emphasized addressing pay parity, worker progression, and adequate resourcing to ensure the projects' continued impact.

The event was attended by representatives from Traveller organisations, PHCTPs, the HSE, community and voluntary sectors, education institutions, and the Department of Health.

This event was hosted in line with the commitment in the National Traveller Health Action Plan, to host an annual stakeholder's event. The National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027 seeks to address inequalities in Traveller health and is overseen by the National Traveller Health Implementation Group.



[Click here to view a video highlighting the event](#)

[Click here to read the RTE feature on the conference](#)

[Click here to view a video showcasing the unique partnership approach in Traveller health infrastructure](#)

Brighter Beginnings: Traveller Healthy Childhood Initiative



The National Traveller Health Implementation Group and the National Healthy Childhood Programme is leading the Brighter Beginnings Initiative, which aims to develop a model of good practice to enhance equality of access to and participation in HSE child health services and improve health outcomes for Traveller children. Brighter Beginnings will support the implementation of Goal 2 of the National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027 which seeks to 'Improve Traveller's equality of access participation and outcomes in mainstream health services through a human right's based approach.'

The initiative will be piloted in two sites across separate Health Regions and will deliver a series of targeted actions. These include identifying pathways to services and increasing direct supports for Traveller children and their families. Additionally, the initiative will also work with HSE mainstream children's service to promote Traveller inclusion through training and Traveller-proofing of services.

The pilots will run for three years, with the possibility of further funding. Brighter Beginnings will build on and further strengthen existing partnerships and practices at local, regional and regional levels and will look to identify and address barriers to access and participation for Traveller children in HSE child services using a social determinants and community development approach to health.

A funding call was issued in March to select the two pilot sites, with plans for the pilot to commence in May 2025.

Sláintecare Healthy Communities – Traveller Health Initiative

The Sláintecare Healthy Communities Initiative is a mainstream Department of Health Programme aimed at addressing the Social determinants of health in disadvantaged communities.

In 2024, €710,000 was made available through a Dormant Accounts Fund by the Department of Health for the Sláintecare Healthy Communities – Traveller Health Initiative. This initiative will support implementation of Goal 3 of the National Traveller Health Action Plan: 'To address the social determinants of Traveller health through targeted and mainstreaming measures.'

In January 2025, five Local Authority areas were awarded €142,000 each to deliver pilot projects over two years. This funding awarded following a call administered by the Genio Trust and adjudicated by a selection committee made up of representatives from the Department of Health, the National Traveller Health Network and the HSE. The projects were developed in partnership between the Local Authorities and Traveller organisations and submitted through Local Development Officers within Local Authorities. Funding was awarded to the following areas: Bray, Co. Wicklow, Cork City, Athy, Co. Kildare, Waterford City and Westmeath.

Each pilot focuses on a specific social determinant of Traveller Health, with areas of focus including accommodation, education, training & employment opportunities and Traveller men's health featuring.

For more information, visit: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/5a337-minister-of-state-colum-burke-announces-successful-projects-for-a-710000-traveller-health-initiative/>

NTHIG Review & Planning



The National Traveller Health Implementation Group (NTHIG) met in January for their annual review and planning meeting. The aim of the meeting was to reflect on the progress made in 2024, and to identify key priorities for 2025. The session provided an opportunity to establish clear and actionable priorities for the year ahead. The group agreed that there should be a renewed focus on Traveller inclusion in mainstream services in line with Goal 2 of NTHAP, while still working to strengthen Traveller health infrastructure including Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects and Traveller Health Units.

NTHIG is also looking to strengthen partnerships and foster collaboration within the new regional structures and focus on developing data-driven insights through work in the area of Ethnic Equality Monitoring.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

The Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) course by Mental Health First Aid Ireland (MHFAI) trains adults who support young people aged 12–18 to assist during mental health challenges or crises until professional help is available. This practical, evidence-based training is ideal for parents, school staff, sports coaches, youth workers, and community leaders, enhancing knowledge, reducing stigma, and boosting confidence in providing mental health first aid.



In 2024, 67 participants completed YMHFA training through five courses. Two were online with participants from across Ireland, while in-person courses were held in Mullingar (CHO8),

Tuam (hosted by Western Traveller & Intercultural Development), and Dublin (Southside Travellers Action Group).

Feedback highlighted the program's engaging structure, knowledgeable instructors, and practical tools for supporting young people. In 2025, MHFAI will deliver five more courses and recruit up to 10 YMHFA Instructors to expand training within communities. For more details, contact Lisa Fox, YMHFA National Trainer, at lisa.fox@sjog.ie.

This project has been supported by HSE Mental Health in support of implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027.

"The course was easy to follow and well presented. The instructors were well informed and knowledgeable and really got the students involved." (Participant on Tuam course)

I would say thanks to the staff and thanks to the group we had – they were brilliant. Very interesting speakers as we all had a chance to have our say. Well done everyone and thanks to the instructors for your time." (Participant in online training)

Six Traveller Community workers receive their BA in Social Science (Community and Youth Work) from Maynooth University

Last year, six Traveller Health Workers graduated from the Bachelor of Social Science Community and Youth Work at Maynooth University. The graduates, the majority of whom are women, all work for Traveller organisations and began the part-time in-service course in 2020.

This initiative was the result of a partnership between by the Eastern Region Traveller Health Unit (ERTHU), Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University (MU), and sought to promote Traveller participation in higher education and support Traveller career progression and employment opportunities within the HSE.

Each student graduating had a diverse education background. Some had very few years of formal schooling, while others had completed their Leaving Certificate. Despite these varied starting points, and challenges which arose during the pandemic, they all shared a common goal: to enhance their skills and progress to undergraduate education.

Patrick Reilly, who is the coordinator of the Eastern Region Traveller Health Unit Mental Health Programme and works with Pavee Point, left school early due to negative experiences.

“I left school before the Junior Certificate. I felt that the teachers had low expectations for me and other Travellers. I was given the opportunity through my work in Traveller Health to go back and do the Community and Youth Work degree later in life. I would have loved to have the same support when I was at school,” he said.



Speaking about the opportunity to go back to college, Bridget Nevin, Primary Health Care Coordinator at Coolock Primary Health Care Project, said “This initiative enabled us as Traveller workers to complete a degree, taking into account gaps in formal education and our core work in community development.”

“I felt very nervous but excited. Nervous because of my age and also maybe that it would be frowned upon to see an older Traveller woman going back to school, excited as I always valued education and it was my dream to go to college and get a degree.” Bridget continued.

Students on the course learned real practical knowledge they could apply to their work, but both Bridget and Patrick particularly enjoyed reinforcing their knowledge of the community development principles and their application especially “to empower young people and their community”.

Having the degree under their belt has given Patrick, and others, the confidence to pursue future career goals. Patrick would love to bring his expertise to “be stronger in policy spaces and lead out on research” and Bridget feels more opportunities are open to her since completing the degree.

“At the moment I am working in a full time community development role. Although this is my passion and I wish to remain in it, I would also like the opportunity to work in the HSE mainstream roles. I am also looking at any future management roles that become available.” said Bridget.

Targeted initiatives like this pilot degree are needed to bridge the gap until all Travellers have the same equality of access, participation and outcomes as anyone else. Collaboration between ERTHU, the HSE, Pavee Point and MU was crucial to this programme's success.

“The success of this programme and its graduates show the impact that strong partnerships can have in driving meaningful and lasting change.” said Martina Queally, Regional Executive Officer for Dublin and South East at the HSE and previous Chairperson of the ER THU.

“I commend the graduates on their hard work, dedication, and resilience throughout this journey. The knowledge, skills, and experiences they have gained will not only enrich their own work but will also inform and shape the development of future programmes and opportunities for Travellers.”

Midterm Review of the NTHAP

This year, the National Traveller Health Implementation Group will begin a mid-term review of implementation of NTHAP in line with commitments outlined in the plan. This process will include engagement with relevant stakeholders in the delivery of the national plan and regional/local implementation plans. This will provide an opportunity to take stock of the learning to date, identify what is working well and make recommendation to support implementation of the plan for the remaining period. It is expected that the review will begin in Quarter two of 2025 and be completed by the end of Q3.

Traveller Cultural Awareness Training (TCAT)



Action 18 of the National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027, aims to “develop standardised training for health service providers to support Traveller cultural safety within the health services”.

Traveller Cultural Awareness Training is provided to service providers including the HSE by Traveller organisations. It aims to challenge racism and discrimination, and ultimately influence service provision and policy to provide better outcomes for Travellers. Cork TCAT is currently leading out on this action.

A national scoping exercise has commenced to map current models of Traveller cultural awareness training being delivered including the location, context, approach and content of the training’s currently being delivered in each HSE Regional Health Area. The aim is to develop a national framework for this training based on consensus and the creation of a model of best practice.

At present, initial data is being gathered on individual Traveller Health Unit's (THU's), Traveller organisation's and community groups around the country, in preparation for facilitated group discussion meetings.

Discussion groups will be made up of representatives from regional HSE THU's, Traveller organisations and relevant stakeholders. Peer workers have been recruited from the Traveller community, to co-facilitate these discussion groups, along with the HSE TCAT framework development coordinator.

These meetings will provide a space to explore opportunities and concerns of Traveller organisation's in relation to the development of a standardised framework, identify any barriers/challenges to the process and explore a means to address them. Plans going forward are to commence with the facilitated discussion group meetings, in all Regional Health Areas around the country. This project is coordinated by the HSE TCAT framework development coordinator and supported by a national working group; made up of HSE national social inclusion, THU and Traveller organisational representatives who advise, support and oversee the process, and support regional engagement of key stakeholders.

For more information contact Claire Mackey, HSE TCAT framework development coordinator
hsetcatframeworkcoordinator@gmail.com or 085 759 8096.

Traveller Health Unit Review

Traveller Health Units or THUs are an important part of the delivery mechanism for implementation of NTHAP. There are seven THU's nationally. Membership of THU's include HSE representatives and representatives of Traveller organisations and Traveller Primary Healthcare Projects. The THUs focus on the health needs of Travellers and work to reduce health inequalities for Travellers within the HSE. They are key to ensuring that Travellers are linked to healthcare and that their health issues are included in general health policies and services. THUs operate at the local level and collaborate with Traveller organisations and Primary Healthcare Projects.

Currently, a national review of THUs is underway in line with action 42 of NTHAP. The aim of this review is to identify key gaps, enablers and barriers to effectiveness in alignment with the Standard Framework for THUs. A key strand of the review is to identify the implications and opportunities for the positioning of the THUs within the new Regional Health Areas.

Traveller Wellbeing Through Creativity Showcase



The HSE and the Arts Council recently worked together to host a Traveller creative arts showcase at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, focusing on health and wellbeing. This event gave Travellers a space to share their artistic talents, reflect on their creative journeys, and talk with key groups about how creativity can support wellbeing. The showcase featured many art forms, including rap, spoken word poetry, group performances, photography, visual arts, writing, and other creative activities.

The event was part of the Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity pilot programme, which ran in 2022 and 2023 to support Traveller health through the arts. Traveller individuals and organisations that received funding through this programme shared their work, experiences, and ideas for keeping these creative projects going.

Grants of up to €50,000 were given to five projects in 2022 and four in 2023. These initiatives, led by Traveller community members, encouraged collaboration between the health, arts, and Traveller sectors at a local level. Some of the highlighted projects included:

- The GAFF and Limerick City Traveller Health Programme
- St. Margaret's Ballymun & the Axis Ballymun
- Travellers of North Cork and partners
- Galway Traveller Movement & Misleór



The event also presented evaluation findings from the first year of the programme, showing how creative arts can improve Traveller wellbeing. These results add to global research linking artistic engagement with better health.

Findings showed that representing Traveller culture, heritage, and traditions in a positive way helped improve overall wellbeing. Attendees reflected on these insights and discussed how to build on the programme's success in the future.



[Click here to watch Creative Ireland's video on the projects](#)



Are you interested in learning more about Traveller health?

Do you want to support Traveller inclusion in health services?

The following HSEland training modules and online information are available to support staff in gaining an understanding of Traveller health needs and may be useful to you when planning your services.



[Introduction to Traveller Health](#)

[Introduction to Ethnic Equality Monitoring](#)



Click here for an introductory webinar on [Ethnic Equality Monitoring](#)



Understanding the needs of Irish Traveller women when presenting to ED in a suicidal crisis

[Click here!](#)



For more information on the NTHAP newsletter, please contact:

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1. Brigid Quirke, Concepta de Brun, Brigid Quilligan, Mary Brigid Collins
2. Missie Collins & Ann Friel
3. Mellany McLoone

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Geraldine McDonnell, Mental Health Worker, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Bridget Nevin, Primary Health Care Coordinator, TravAct, Patrick Reilly, Mental Health Coordinator, Pavee Point, Megan McDonnell, DSGBV worker, Pavee Point, Geraldine, Southside Travellers Action Group (STAG), graduate from their BA in Social Science (Community and Youth Work) at Maynooth University. All pictured are members of the Traveller community and were supported to return to education as part of an initiative by the Eastern Region Traveller Health Unit (ERTHU), Pavee Point, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University (MU), which sought to promote Traveller participation in higher education and to support Traveller employment opportunities within the HSE. (Photograph by Tommy Clancy)

Links

30 Years of Primary Health Care for Travellers Project Conference Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReDk_BUCYkA

RTE feature on the conference: <https://www.rte.ie/news/health/2024/1211/1485794-phctp-conference/#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%2030%20years,women%20in%20the%20general%20population.>

Video featuring partnership approach in Traveller health infrastructure: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaQFTPeBTcQ>

Creative Ireland's Traveller Wellbeing Through Creativity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRT27SpziGs>

Understanding the needs of Irish Traveller women when presenting to ED in a suicidal crisis: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIL30TpeXfs>