



National Traveller Health Action Plan Newsletter | Fourth Edition



An update from the Chair of NTHIG

I would like to welcome you all to the fourth edition of the National Traveller Health Action Plan newsletter which features updates on the work undertaken at national and regional level in the implementation of the NTHAP for the second half of 2025.

Of note, a number of important reviews have been undertaken this year, including a mid-term review of the NTHAP and a review of Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects, both of which feature in this edition. These reviews set the tone and will guide the implementation of NTHAP over the remaining two years of the plan. The Framework for the Traveller Cultural Awareness Anti-Racism (TCAART) training is also being finalised and will be available early next year. NTHIG will host a webinar in February next to feedback the findings of the reviews, share updates on the TCAART and provide recommendations to stakeholders to support an enhance implementation of the plan. A welcome development this year has been the Traveller Brighter Beginnings pilot initiatives, which have begun in earnest. Recruitment of staff is in progress, and Traveller child health needs assessments are underway with more funding for two new pilots from next year.

Regionally, Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects and staff in HSE Social Inclusion/Traveller Health Units continue their partnership work to support Traveller access and participation in mainstream health services. Some of this good work is highlighted in this edition of the newsletter. Also featured is the recently published research from UCD undertaken on behalf of the National Cancer Control Programme and co-produced in partnership with Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. The findings highlight strong health literacy among Travellers and higher screening rates compared to the general population, which are linked to the work of the Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the staff across the HSE and Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects for their hard work on implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan in 2025, and I look forward to continuing this good work into 2026.

Kindest regards,

Aisling Heffernan, Chair of the National Traveller Health Implementation Group, IHA Manager, Dublin South and Wicklow

In this issue...

All-Island Health Conference

PHCTP Review

Midterm Review of NTHAP

Men's Health Day

Traveller Brighter Beginnings

Report on Cancer Research

NTHIG Partnership Working

Update on the NTHIG Training Sub-group

Update on the Review of Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects (PHCTPs)



The review of the PHCTPs, which began in May, is progressing well and is on track to be completed in January 2026. Once finalised, the findings and recommendations will be shared with all relevant stakeholders to support future planning and strengthen the work of PHCTPs nationally. This review was requested by the Department of Health and is included in the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy Action II and the HSE Service Plan for 2025.



Susie Donnelly Research is conducting the review on behalf of the National Traveller Health Implementation Group, which has put in place an Oversight Group to manage the process. The data collection phase, which concluded in November, involved two case studies (one rural and one urban), two national workshops with PHCTP staff, focus groups with HSE Social Inclusion teams and Traveller Health Unit staff, and surveys distributed to HSE staff, Traveller organisation managers, community and voluntary organisations, and academic stakeholders.

Semi structured interviews with other relevant stakeholders from the Department of Health, HSE, Academics and Traveller organisations were also part of the review process with the data currently being collated and the report due to be finalised and presented to the National Traveller Health Implementation Group in January.

Development of Training Modules for Traveller Community Health Workers by NTHIG Training Sub-Group



The NTHIG Training Sub-Group has commenced a scoping of current training levels of staff in working in Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects. This scoping will inform the development of standardised trainings for staff in the projects. The scoping process includes regional meetings with projects and the submission of reports from all projects detailing the training completed over the past three years. This initiative aligns with Action 23 of the NTHAP, which focuses on developing structured education pathways for staff working in Primary Health Care for Travellers projects, and Action 43, which aims to strengthen and resource these projects.

Building Capacity in PHCTPs



Five PHCTP staff members successfully graduated from ATU Donegal at the end of October with a Certificate in Community Development Practice, accredited by the All-Ireland Endorsement Body (AIEB). This achievement reflects a key priority of the NTHAP to address the recruitment and retention of PHCTP staff while creating opportunities for upskilling and increased employment, factors directly linked to the social determinants of health.

The NTHIG is also working to scope and develop a standardised minimum training framework for PHCTP staff. Donegal PHCTP is actively participating in this scoping exercise, and achievements like this will help inform and shape its development.



Update on the Review of the National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027

The NTHAP 2022–2027 includes a commitment to undertake a mid-term review. The International Foundation for Integrated Care (IFIC) undertook the review on behalf of the HSE NTHIG, beginning in May 2025.

Purpose and Approach

The review aimed to assess progress on implementation and inform the second phase of delivery. Recognising the Plan's role in addressing long-standing Traveller health inequalities, it sought to identify barriers, enablers, and lessons to strengthen implementation. Using a mixed-methods approach and working in partnership with Traveller representatives, the review drew on programme documents, stakeholder interviews, a national survey of HSE staff and Primary Healthcare for Travellers staff, and a focus group with core implementers.

Key Findings

- The NTHAP has provided a vital framework for action, improving visibility and structure for Traveller health initiatives.
- National-level governance and reporting systems have enhanced coordination.
- Regional implementation remains uneven due to resource constraints, staffing challenges, and structural changes within the HSE.
- Strong partnerships and Traveller engagement emerged as key enablers.
- Limited funding and recruitment difficulties were the most cited barriers.

Recommendations

- Continue sharing progress and supporting learning across regions.
- Prepare for new HSE structures and develop a post-2027 vision for Traveller health.
- Maintain Traveller representation in all structures.
- Promote Traveller inclusion in mainstream services and strengthen local supports.
- Set realistic goals, manage resources, and address recruitment gaps.
- Update Regional Traveller Health Implementation Plans and strengthen monitoring.
- Put in place a process for a final evaluation at the end of the current plan.

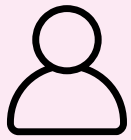
Review of the National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027: Key Insights



63 survey responses from stakeholders at national, regional and local levels



17 semi-structured interviews were carried out with stakeholders at national, regional, and local levels.



Roles of Respondents

39 HSE

19 Traveller organisations

16 PHCTPs



1

focus group with key implementers

Respondents' Experience in Traveller Health

35% more than 10 years

25% 0-2 years

24% 3-5 years

Perceived Benefits of NTHAP

75% said it raised the profile of Traveller health across HSE services.

70% noted additional resources to support Traveller health work.

66% said it strengthened Traveller health structures.

60% said it gave structure to existing Traveller health work.



Regional Implementation Progress

53% reported their region is on track with milestones.

81% believe regional plans are comprehensive and achievable.



Key Enablers

- Active involvement of Traveller community members.
- Strong leadership and support for Traveller health.
- Effective partnerships between Traveller organisations and statutory bodies.



Key Barriers

- Limited staff resources (most cited).
- Lack of funding or financial resources.
- Competing priorities within HSE services.

"The Plan acts as a reference to engage other sections of the HSE, to bring professionals and paraprofessionals around the table, to improve Travellers' health." [Survey response]

"The main contribution is that there is a structure there [...] there has been engagement, there has been buy in from the Traveller community [...]"

"Areas reported that the Plan has offered a framework in which to situate existing and new Traveller health work that extends the remit of the work into mainstream health services." [Reflections on Implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan - Event 15th May 2025]

New Study Highlights Cancer Awareness, Screening Uptake and Ongoing Inequalities Among Travellers



The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme has commissioned a landmark, co-designed study led by UCD in partnership with the Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre on cancer awareness and attitudes among Travellers in Ireland. The research, supported throughout by Traveller Community Health Workers, included a survey of 483 Travellers as well as in-depth interviews with Travellers and healthcare professionals.

A key finding is that Travellers report higher uptake of mainstream cancer screening services than the general population, echoing results from the 2010 All-Ireland Traveller Health Study. The study also highlights strong levels of health literacy among participants. Despite this, significant inequalities in cancer outcomes remain, particularly in morbidity and mortality, underscoring the ongoing impact of racism, discrimination, wider social determinants of health, and barriers within the health system.

Key findings

- 36% of Traveller respondents reported having had a cancer diagnosis, and 42% reported a family member with cancer.
- Barriers to screening and early diagnosis include racism and discrimination, non-receipt of screening invitations (18%), embarrassment (21%), fear of results (19%), and difficulty accessing post (18%).
- Barriers to seeking help for symptoms include reluctance to speak with a receptionist (37%), fear of diagnosis (32%), and concern about needing further tests (31%).

Strengths & Enablers

- Travellers are accessing screening services at a higher rate than the general population.
- There are higher rates of cancer screening uptake among Travellers **who received an invitation for screening.**
- 84% of Travellers reported attending breast screening, compared with 70% in the general population.
- 88% of Travellers reported cervical cancer screening, compared with 75% in the general population.
- 60% of Travellers participated in bowel screening, compared with 46% in the general population.

The report shows that almost 1 in 5 (18%) Travellers did not receive an invitation to screening services. Traveller Primary Health Care Projects are highlighted as key in supporting access to screening, through developing and sharing culturally appropriate health information and encouraging people to attend. Twenty-eight percent of Travellers who used screening services did so after speaking with a local Traveller Primary Health Care Worker.

Health literacy levels are also strong, with many Travellers able to recognise cancer signs and symptoms and understanding how to reduce risk, especially when information is provided in clear, culturally appropriate formats.

[For more information about the study, please click here](#)

Launch of Traveller Wellbeing Through Creativity



The new iteration of the Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity Programme was officially launched on 4 December, building on valuable learnings from pilot projects over the past two years. This Traveller-led initiative emphasises a strong partnership approach and is delivered in collaboration with the Creative Ireland Programme, the HSE, and the Arts Council.

Applications for funding are now open for arts projects taking place in 2026/27. Funding is available in two categories:
€5,000–€10,000 for small projects
€10,000–€20,000 for larger projects

Projects must involve Travellers in a leadership role and encourage a diverse range of creative ideas. Applications close on **18 February 2026**, with successful applicants notified on 20 March 2026.

The launch, opened by Aisling Heffernan, highlighted the extensive co-design process behind the programme, ensuring strong stakeholder engagement. Throughout 2026, learning and engagement workshops will run to support programme aims and foster collaboration.

For more information, click [here](#).



Traveller Brighter Beginnings Initiative: Expanding Access and Inclusion

In support of Goal 2 of the NTHAP, the Department of Health has provided funding for the Traveller Brighter Beginnings Initiative. This programme aims to develop a model of good practice in delivering healthcare services that improve **equality of access, participation, and health outcomes for Traveller children**. The initiative focuses on creating pathways and direct supports for Traveller children and their families to engage with mainstream health services. It also promotes Traveller inclusion in HSE children's services through Traveller proofing and building cultural competency within the health system.

Following a funding call in March of this year, two pilot sites, one in the West and another in the South East, were selected. The pilots are developing Traveller child health needs assessments in each area, which will inform work plans and guide actions that directly address the identified needs. The pilots are also working to enhance Traveller cultural competency within mainstream health services and to support and improve health literacy among Traveller parents.

Recruitment has been underway in each of the pilot projects for nursing posts and dedicated child health staff in Traveller organisations. To date, the pilot sites are establishing local oversight structures, collaborating with Public health and public health nursing teams and working on the Child health needs analyses.



Funding and Expansion:

The Department of Health has confirmed funding to expand the initiative beyond the initial pilots, with support for two additional projects in 2026. A call for proposals for this projects issued to the Regions in December, and will be assessed in January.

Current Progress in the Pilot Areas:

- Collaboration with public health and public health nursing teams.
- Conducting a child health needs analysis.
- Establishing local oversight structures.

Success at the All-Island Health Conference



Brigid Nevin from the Coolock Primary Health Care for Travellers Project, representing the National Traveller Health Network, and Dr. Aileen Kitching, Consultant in Public Health, HSE National Health Service Improvement (Public Health) / HSE National Social Inclusion Office won first prize, at the All-Island Health Protection & Health Inequalities Conference in Belfast.

Their award-winning presentation highlighted the work of the Social Inclusion Working Group of the National Immunisation Oversight Committee, focusing on equality in immunisation programmes and the vital role of Traveller Primary Health Care Workers in delivering culturally appropriate health services.

Their work was commended for their partnership approach and emphasis on strengthening relationships and engaging communities effectively.

The event brought together leading health experts, including Prof. Mary Horgan, Chief Medical Officer (ROI), Prof. Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer (NI), Dr. John Cuddihy, National Director of Public Health (ROI), Dr. Joanne McClean, National Director of Public Health (NI), and Dr. Mike Ryan (formerly WHO).

Celebrating a New Chapter: Launch of the Mayo Primary Health Care for Travellers Project



Thelma Birrane, Social Inclusion Coordinator- HSE West & member of the NTHIG

On October 7th, 2025, people from across the country came together in Castlebar to celebrate the launch of the newly reestablished Mayo Traveller Movement CLG.

At the launch event, speakers highlighted the importance of peer-led approaches. Traveller community members will take an active role in sharing health information and providing assistance, ensuring that services remain culturally sensitive, accessible, and effective.

The event was marked by a strong sense of pride, unity, and optimism. Families and partner organisations gathered not only to celebrate this significant achievement but also to reaffirm their shared commitment to a more inclusive and equitable health system.

For years, the Mayo Traveller Movement has championed equality, and this project stands as a major milestone in meeting the health needs of Travellers across the county.



[Mayo Traveller Movement CLG Facebook Page](#)

NTHIG Showcases Partnership Work at HSE Patient and Public Engagement Conference



Mary Nevin (Longford PHCTP), Michelle Kearns (Project Manager, Traveller Health, HSE NSIO), and Aisling Heffernan (IHA Manager, Dublin South and Wicklow and Chair of the National Traveller Health Implementation Group) represented the National Traveller Health Implementation Group at the 3rd HSE Patient and Public Engagement Conference, presenting a poster that highlighted the strong partnership structures within Traveller health and the collaborative efforts driving the implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027.

Traveller health is built on strong, community-led partnerships, with Travellers actively involved in shaping policy and practice through structures like NTHIG, Traveller Health Units and local Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects. These partnerships ensure that Traveller voices and lived experiences inform the design, delivery, and evaluation of health services, promoting equity and cultural inclusion.

The conference, themed “Navigating Our Patient Partnership Journey Together,” brought together participants from across the country to share ideas for improving healthcare. Discussions focused on strengthening collaboration between the HSE and service users, with sessions covering disability services, homelessness, mental health, technology, chronic disease, and children’s rights. Through workshops, plenary sessions, and Q&A panels, attendees explored ways to build on existing initiatives and spark new opportunities for partnership.

This engagement underscores the commitment to inclusive health planning and highlights how Traveller health structures are leading the way in embedding community participation at every level.

Men’s Health Day Promotes Wellbeing for Traveller and Roma Men



Men’s Health Day returned to Phoenix Park this year, drawing over 250 attendees. The event featured a wide range of service providers offering health checks and essential health information, specifically tailored to the needs of Traveller and Roma men.

This initiative aligns with Action 26 of the NTHAP, which calls for supporting and resourcing peer-led initiatives focused on Traveller men to improve mental health and wellbeing. By creating accessible spaces for health engagement, the event reinforces the importance of culturally appropriate health promotion.

The day also reflects commitments under Connecting for Life, Ireland’s national suicide prevention strategy, and the priorities outlined by the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community. These frameworks emphasise collaborative approaches to reducing health inequalities and improving outcomes for marginalised groups.

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 Ethnic Data Collection: 30 mins

Introduction to Traveller Health: 45 mins

Diversity Equality and inclusion- 3 modules

- Module 1: Introduction: 30 mins
- Module 2: Inclusive communication at work: 45 mins
- Module 3: Working in a diverse team: 45 mins



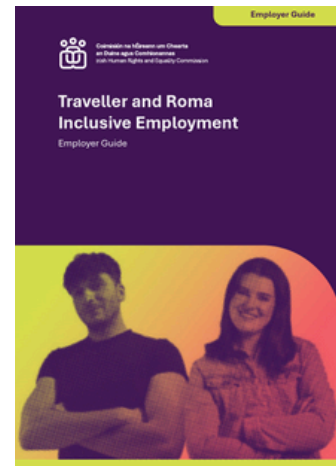
Click here for an introductory webinar on [Ethnic Equality Monitoring](#)



Launch of Inclusive Employment Guide for Travellers and Roma

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has launched the Inclusive Employment for Traveller and Roma – Employer Guide, an initiative of its Worker and Employer Advisory Committee (WEAC).

This collaborative effort brings together employers and trade unions. The guide aims to address the significant barriers Travellers and Roma face in accessing employment and to improve their representation in workplaces across Ireland.



[Download the guide here](#)



National Social Inclusion Office Resources & Support on Ethnic Data Collection

The National Social Inclusion Office (NSIO) are carrying out a programme of work to develop and support Ethnic Data Collection within a range of health services.

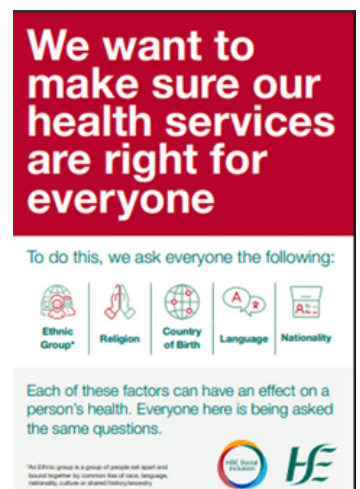
[What is Ethnicity and Ethnic Data Collection?](#)

[Legal requirements and actions in strategies](#)

[Posters in various languages](#)

[Webinar-Introduction to Ethnic Equality Monitoring or Ethnic Data Collection](#)

[Translated ethnic data collection categories](#)



[For more information, click here](#)



Social Determinants of Traveller Health

Video developed by the Southern Traveller Health Network & University College Cork

[Click here!](#)



Useful acronyms for Traveller health:

EEM	Ethnic Equality Monitoring involves the systematic and regular collection of data on the ethnic composition of a population, including disaggregation by gender, to identify and address inequalities. It helps ensure equal access to and outcomes from public services for all ethnic groups by monitoring the impact of policies and practices on different groups
EI	Ethnic Identifier is a method of classifying individuals based on their ethnic background, typically involving identifying a shared cultural, religious, or racial heritage. It is used to collect data about the diverse populations within a specific region or context, like education systems or healthcare services.
Ethnicity	is a measure of a close cultural connection as opposed to race, nationality or citizenship. It involves sharing background characteristics such as a shared history, common ancestry, geographical origin, language culture and religion
NTHAF	National Traveller Health Advisory Forum provides national coordination and support for Traveller health planning, delivery and monitoring. The Forum generally meets every 6 weeks and comprises HSE staff, Traveller Health Unit (THU) Coordinators, a Traveller organisation/PHCP representative from each THU, and representatives from national Traveller organisations. Concepta de Brun chairs NTHAF, and it has 4 seats on NTHIG.
NTHAP	National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027
NTHIG	National Traveller Health Implementation Group
PHCTP	Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects
TCAT	Traveller Cultural Awareness Training
TCHW	Traveller Community Health workers, working in Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects
THU	Traveller Health Units operate at CHO level and are a partnership between the HSE and local Traveller organisations/Primary Healthcare for Traveller Projects. They support the development of Traveller-specific services, either directly by the HSE or indirectly through appropriate voluntary organisations. Traveller Health Units lead out on the development of CHO Traveller Health Implementation plans and play a key role in leading out on implementation and monitoring of these plans at local level.

For more information on the NTHAP newsletter, please contact:

Michelle Kearns, michelle.kearns2@hse.ie

Monica Rzepka, monica.rzepka@hse.ie