

From the Chief Medical Officer  
**Professor Sir Michael McBride**



**HSS(MD) 21/2026**

**FOR ACTION**

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/HSC  
Trusts/NIAS  
Chief Operating Officer, SPPG  
GP Medical Advisers, SPPG  
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for  
onward distribution to practice staff*)  
OOH Medical Managers (*for onward distribution to  
staff*)

Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast BT4 3SQ  
Tel: 028 90 520653  
Email: [cmooffice@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:cmooffice@health-ni.gov.uk)

Your Ref:  
Our Ref: HSS(MD) 21/2026  
Date: 9 June 2026

Dear Colleague

**REPLACEMENT OF CIRCULAR HSC (SQSD) 13/22: NICE CLINICAL  
GUIDELINES – PROCESS FOR ENDORSEMENT, IMPLEMENTATION,  
MONITORING AND ASSURANCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

I am writing to inform you that the Department of Health has reviewed, updated and replaced Circular HSC (SQSD) 13/22, which previously set out the process for the endorsement, implementation, monitoring and assurance of National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Clinical Guidelines in Northern Ireland.

Following extensive engagement between the Department, the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG), the NICE Implementation Consultant and Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, a new circular - **Circular HSC (SQSD) 9/26** - has been developed. A copy of this circular is provided at **Annex A** (attached separately).

This new circular provides a comprehensive refresh of the existing arrangements and outlines the Northern Ireland policy framework and responsibilities of the Department and HSC organisations in relation to the dissemination, implementation, monitoring and assurance of NICE Guidelines with a clinical focus relating to specific diseases and/or groups of patients.

The circular represents an evolution of previous arrangements and seeks to clarify the policy intent behind the process for implementing NICE Clinical Guidelines, adjust the focus of the HSC towards actively progressing implementation, and align arrangements for implementation of NICE Guidelines with wider continuous quality improvement and implementation of safety and quality guidance within the HSC. This includes clarity on the responsibility of HSC Trust Boards to ensure that there

are appropriate governance and assurance arrangements in place to manage and monitor progress with implementation of NICE Guidelines aligned to the statutory duty of quality outlined in Article 34 of the HPSS (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (NI) Order 2003.

The new arrangements will take effect from **1 July 2026**. They apply to all HSC organisations, including Family Practitioners which can include General Medical and Dental Practitioners, Community Pharmacies and Community Optometrists. They should also be noted by independent health and social care providers.

### **Key Changes in Circular HSC (SQSD) 9/26**

The updated circular introduces a number of important changes, including

- **Expanded detail:**

The revised circular is significantly more comprehensive, providing enhanced context, definitions, and clarity on roles and responsibilities for all aspects of endorsement, implementation, monitoring and assurance of NICE Guidelines within the HSC.

- **Updated terminology and scope:**

Arrangements set out in the circular apply to all NICE Guidelines with a clinical focus (including those labelled CG and NG), with clearer definitions and explanations of NICE terminology, reflecting changes in NICE guidance programmes over recent years.

- **Strengthened policy context and legal duties:**

The circular reinforces the link between NICE Guideline implementation and existing statutory responsibilities, accountability, patient safety, risk management and quality improvement. While NICE recommendations are not mandatory, and NICE guidelines do not override the responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances of the service user in consultation with them and their families and carers or guardians, they do set out priority areas for improving health and social care services. HSC commissioners and providers should therefore use NICE guidelines to plan and deliver services that provide the highest quality care possible within available resources.

- **Enhanced expectations for implementation, monitoring and assurance:**

There is clearer articulation of the roles of SPPG/Public Health Agency (PHA), HSC Trusts and the HSC NICE Guidance Implementation Forum (formerly NICE Managers Forum). The circular places greater emphasis on system-wide collaboration, and alignment with existing accountability arrangements, including the requirement for Trust Boards and senior leadership teams to have visibility of implementation progress and associated risks. The revised circular also sets out updated assurance arrangements for the implementation of NICE Guidelines in primary care and independent sector settings.

## **Development of the HSC NICE Guidance Implementation Forum**

A key feature of the revised circular is an enhanced role of the former NICE Managers Forum, now renamed the **HSC NICE Guidance Implementation Forum**. While implementation of NICE guidelines is the responsibility of individual HSC Trusts, it is recognised that in some cases implementation of some or all of the recommendations in a NICE guideline may require a regional approach. The refreshed HSC NICE Guidance Implementation Forum will identify areas where a regional approach to implementation is required and support the initiation of provider collaborative arrangements to resolve identified barriers to implementation and drive consistency in approach to planning and implementation of NICE guidelines across the HSC.

The terms of reference and membership of the Forum will be updated to reflect this enhanced role. Further correspondence will issue in due course to Trust Chief Executives, Medical Directors and Directors of Planning, providing a draft terms of reference and inviting nominations for membership of the Forum.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all stakeholders for their constructive engagement and contribution to the development of this updated circular. It is anticipated that these revisions will strengthen and streamline the processes for the endorsement, implementation and assurance of NICE Guidelines with a clinical focus across Northern Ireland, supporting improved patient outcomes and service quality.

A link to **Circular HSC (SQSD) 9/26**, titled **NICE Guidelines: Process for Endorsement, Implementation, Monitoring and Assurance in Northern Ireland** is available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/national-institute-health-and-care-excellence-nice>

If you have any queries regarding the revised circular, please contact: Medicines Access Branch, D4, Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SQ, or e-mail: [SGU-NICEGuidance@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:SGU-NICEGuidance@health-ni.gov.uk)

Yours sincerely



**Prof Sir Michael McBride**  
**Chief Medical Officer**

### **Circulation List**

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency  
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

