

NHSBT Board Meeting – 31 January 2023

Written update from Northern Ireland

Legislation

The passing of 'Daíthí's Law' by the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly in February 2022 marked an important first step in the introduction of a deemed consent system for organ donation in Northern Ireland.

Royal Assent was received in March 2022, allowing for a 12-month period of implementation and preparation, which has included staff recruitment, training and education, as well as a comprehensive programme of public awareness.

For Dáithí's Law to come into effect, secondary legislation is required. This has been drafted and is ready to be laid before the NI Assembly. In addition, revised Human Tissue Authority Codes of Practice completed the necessary processes in Westminster on 7 November 2022.

Both the secondary legislation and the revised Code of Practice require the NI Assembly to be sitting before they can complete the legislative process. As the Assembly is not currently sitting, the planned legislation commencement date of Spring 2023 will unfortunately be delayed.

The Department of Health has worked alongside NHSBT and the Public Health Agency and estimates that a period of 12 weeks will be required from the approval of the secondary legislation to the new system going live.

As a result, contingency plans have been activated, which will allow the Department's implementation planning project to remain in a state of readiness pending the restoration of the Assembly.

In the meantime, while public awareness activities will continue to ensure the population is reminded of the forthcoming law change.

Promotional Activity

Promotion of introduction of deemed consent legislation

The third burst of activity of the “Lifesaver” campaign ran across radio, outdoor, digital and social channels across November and December. Early indications show continued strong levels of engagement, with a full campaign evaluation underway.

Planning is underway for 2023 activity; however, as noted above, contingency plans have been activated due to the delay in the introduction of deemed consent. A campaign burst planned for March and April, which would have announced the legislation go-live date, will still be utilised to keep up the momentum of law change awareness; however, messaging and media channels have been amended.

Production of TV advertising and direct mail will continue, but these channels will not be utilised until a legislation go-live date can be confirmed. A rolling 3-month plan has been actioned which allows as much flexibility as possible depending on the political situation.

A third interval of tracking research is currently underway to examine levels of understanding and awareness around the law change as well as evaluation of the November/December campaign activity.

Outreach and engagement activity in support of deemed consent legislation

The Organ Donation Promotion Manager continues to attend a range of events across NI to raise awareness and understanding of the forthcoming law change as well as to educate on the topic of organ donation in general.

The distribution of materials to venues in local communities, as well as provision of digital materials continues. This includes healthcare settings, Local Council venues, and regional locations of the police, fire, and prison services.

Promotion of organ donation – general

Organ Donation Discussion Day

A local initiative in NI is Organ Donation Discussion Day, which takes place on 11 December each year. The purpose of the day is to raise awareness of organ donation in saving and transforming lives and to think of this #GiftOfLife in the run up to Christmas. It also reinforces the importance of sharing organ donation decisions with family.

A range of stories and messages ran across the day primarily from those who had received the gift of life, as well as some informational posts.

The activity achieved a reach of over 36,700 on Facebook and Instagram, and almost 12,300 impressions on Twitter, which includes content carried on the Public Health Agency's channels.

Organ donation general awareness campaign

Paid-for digital activity to promote a general organ donation message will run across February 2023. This will ensure the topic of organ donation is kept front of mind prior to the next burst of the legislation awareness campaign.

The focus of the campaign will be to convey the importance of organ donation in saving and transforming lives, and of sharing organ donation decisions.

Living donation

Planning is underway for some organic digital activity to promote living donation. This will involve informational posts supported by inspirational video stories.

School's resources

Work continues to develop school's resources for primary and post-primary schools. At present, the primary resources are most advanced with a small pilot due for issue late January.