

# Response to DHSSPS Health and Social Care Innovation Grant Scheme

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

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The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation operating across Northern Ireland, with a mission to 'advance women's equality and participation in society by working to transform political, economic, social and cultural conditions. The organisation was established in 1983 and continues its focus on working with women and community organisations located in disadvantaged areas. WRDA is a membership organisation with over 190 members comprised of women's groups, organizations and individual members.

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Health and Social Care Innovation Grant Scheme.

# **2 COMMENTS**

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The unique contribution of women's organisations to meeting the health and social care needs of women and families in areas of disadvantage must be recognised in relation to funding streams. There is a mistaken belief that women are now equal to men and therefore do not require additional support or services, or from a mistaken reading of s 75 to the effect that women and men have to be treated the same in all respects. We very much hope that rather than a blanket EQIA stating that this programme of funding will benefit all, that a property Section 75 analysis will be undertaken which will highlight the areas relating to health inequalities facing women and families from areas of deprivation.

The women's sector and the community and voluntary sector in general is an important contributor to meeting the health and social care needs of those living in Northern Ireland. As the consultation document states we 'play an integral role in the delivery of health and social care solutions'. However, the sustainability of these services requires the right incentives

and resources as the sector faces what is a rapidly changing and challenging funding environment.

We very much welcome the announcement of this new funding stream however, we believe there is a need to incorporate and develop an effective partnership between local government, central government and the community and voluntary sector around shared goals and strategies and how those services delivered by the community and voluntary sector can be prudently funded over time, beyond the maximum of 3 years funding offered by the new Innovation Fund. We firmly believe that this would enhance and strengthen the outcomes based accountability that is high on the agenda. It would also be an opportunity to move away from a silo mentality to a practice that incentivises all those involved in delivering outcomes and will reduce duplication.

The Eligibility Criteria, Themes and Assessments contained within the consultation are to be welcomed. We are particularly pleased that there will be full cost recovery and that payment will be made in advance.

All activities and resources must be funded in a fair, transparent and appropriate manner. Moreover, the funding decisions must take cognisance of the different environments, demographics within Northern Ireland and recognise the diverse nature of communities and the pressures placed upon the community and voluntary sector. The funding allocation must take account of these differences and the investment must contribute to the long-term sustainability of communities.

We would welcome further information on how organisations, particularly within the women's sector, will be assisted to collate and share evidence which is being sought around outcomes based accountability. As you will be aware there are some organisations who have experience of this and others who have not. It is important there is a 'fair playing field'.

We acknowledge that this fund does not represent a 'silver bullet' to addressing the funding issues experienced by the community and voluntary sector, instead we see this fund as part of a mix that offers a credible solution to moving beyond the current funding crises. However, there is an issue of core funding that needs to be addressed. Funding for women's organisations in meeting the needs of women and their families must be a government commitment, which should be reinforced by the UK government's commitment to ensure the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

When proper funding levers are in place, the women's sector can build strong local communities and improve health outcomes.

Many policy makers often suffer from a lack of understanding surrounding the role of the community and voluntary sector, we are pleased therefore that the Design Team is a broad representation of both policy expertise and expertise from the community and voluntary sector.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

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It is important to note that underpinning a strong health and social care service within communities is a strong women's sector which delivers and improves health outcomes.

We very much welcome the proposal for the new Health and Social Care Innovation Grant Scheme. It is with a resilient funding base our members will be in a position to continue to improve health outcomes for women and their families.