

March, 2026

**iREACH
HEALTH**

www.ireachhealth.co.uk

iREACH Health Newsletter |

2nd Edition

Welcome to the 2nd edition of the iREACH Health Newsletter.

iREACH Health: Moving from Vision to Delivery in 2026

Following major progress in 2025 - strengthening infrastructure, partnerships, and workforce. iREACH Health is now firmly focused on delivery and building the foundations for long-term impact in clinical research and innovation across Northern Ireland.

Key Highlights

- Stage 5 construction on Buildings A and B advancing a shared research environment. Building A is located on the City Hospital side of the Lisburn Road, Building B directly faces A from the other side of the Lisburn Road.
- Accelerated workforce development.
- Deepening strategic partnerships with Celerion, Evolve, and wider industry.
- Planned expansion of clinical leadership across investigator-led and commercial trials.
- Progress in all-island collaboration.

Looking Ahead

2026 will be pivotal as we move toward delivery and operational readiness. Buildings A and B remain on track for early 2027 completion, bringing us closer to a fully integrated research and innovation environment.



MAKING NORTHERN IRELAND A REGION OF CHOICE FOR CLINICAL TRIALS



Construction Status update: Build is well underway

BUILD PROGRESS: 38 & 52 LISBURN ROAD



Construction across iREACH Health Building A & B continues to progress, with works advancing in line with the current programme.

Site A remains on track for completion in Q2 2027, while Site B is scheduled to complete slightly earlier, in Q1 2027.

PARTNERSHIPS

- Health Minister Mike Nesbitt has announced the appointment of Professor Ian Bruce (PVC and Chair of iREACH Health Project Board) as Non-Executive Director to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT).
- Professor Judy Bradley attended the first BHSCT Board Directors of 2026, providing an update on build progress and plans for operational readiness.
- She highlighted the importance of joint working, shared systems, and aligned priorities to ensure the right people are engaged at the right time and able to deliver required changes over the next 18 months.



Professor Ian Bruce, Newly appointed Non-Executive Director of BHSCT

CONNECTION



Professor Stuart Elborn, New Non-Executive Chair of BHSCT

Professor Stuart Elborn has been appointed as the Non-Executive Chair of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

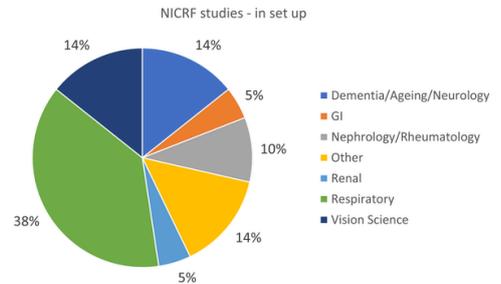
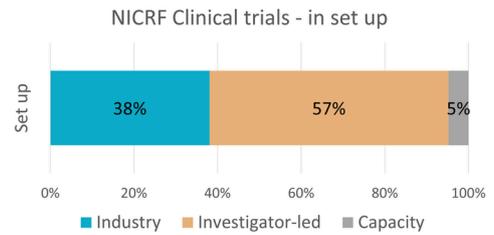
A leading clinical academic, he brings more than four decades of experience across healthcare delivery, higher education, medical research and senior leadership.

Throughout his career, Professor Elborn has championed major strategic transformation initiatives, strengthening clinical services alongside research and innovation infrastructure. His previous role with the iREACH Health leadership team positions him strongly to support the Trust's mission and strengthen its research-enabled care.

INDUSTRY TRIAL GROWTH

The NICRF which will relocate to iREACH Health Building A, is expanding its portfolio of industry-led studies across multiple disease areas, reflecting strong growth in commercial research.

The studies now in set-up demonstrate both rising industry demand and a significant increase in trials emerging in new and evolving therapeutic areas.



FREDRICK WATSON
CLINICAL TRIAL PATIENT

PATIENT-CENTERED

Patients are at the centre of NICRF clinical trials. Watch the video to see Fredrick's story and hear Dr Emma McConnell's insight into Ophthalmology research at the NICRF and the expansion to iREACH Health.

TEAMWORK EXCELLENCE: NIMBLE TRIAL

At the NICRF, exceptional teamwork goes beyond collaboration - it is a collective drive to deliver outstanding research through shared expertise, seamless coordination, and a clear commitment to improving patient outcomes.

The Respiratory Clinical Research Team across the NICRF and NICRN set a new benchmark for collaborative trial delivery. Led by Prof. Liam Heaney, the teams achieved Top Recruiter status for the NIMBLE trial, evaluating a new treatment for severe eosinophilic asthma. They were commended by the Clinical Research Organisation for excellence, regulatory rigour, and unwavering dedication to participant safety.

[Click Here](#) for more info.



Prof. Liam Heaney, NIMBLE trial lead for the Belfast site

STRONG RECRUITMENT TO AIR-NET TRIAL

The NICRF @ iREACH team has made strong early progress in the AIR-NET bronchiectasis study; a multicentre trial testing whether existing anti-inflammatory medicines can be safely repurposed to improve outcomes for people with bronchiectasis. Led by Dr Dermot Linden, the study is being delivered across a European research network.



Dr Dermot Linden, PI for the Belfast AIR-NET team

"We truly appreciate your continued effort in screening, enrolling, and supporting participants. Your contribution is helping us move closer to achieving the goals of AIR-NET and ensuring the success of the trial."

AIR-NET Trial management to the Belfast team

The first participant was consented on 5th of December, just 17 days after green light approval - demonstrating exceptional preparation, teamwork and patient engagement. So far, 5 participants have completed screening, with 2 already randomised and on treatment, and the remaining 3 due for randomisation next week.

For more information about AIR-NET [click here](#)

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: NICRF @ IREACH HEALTH

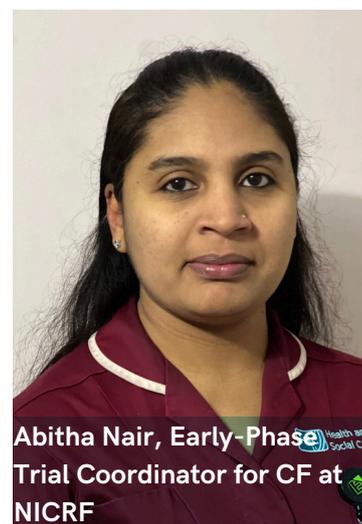
Behind every study at NICRF @ iREACH Health is a dedicated research team. In each edition, we spotlight one of the people helping deliver world-class clinical research. This month, Abitha shares insight into her role and experience.

Abitha is the Clinical Trials Accelerator Platform Early Phase Trial Coordinator for Cystic Fibrosis studies at NICRF. Principal Investigator Prof Damian Downey secured funding for 2 Clinical Trials Accelerator Platform posts.

Abitha brings a strong background in clinical nursing and complex trial delivery across respiratory and infectious diseases. She began her career as a Registered Nurse in medical, trauma, and orthopaedics settings before moving into research during the COVID-19 response - gaining deep expertise in study set-up, participant pathways, and high-quality, patient-centred care. In her current role, Abitha works closely with investigators, sponsors, and multidisciplinary teams to ensure the safe and efficient delivery of early-phase and advanced therapy studies.

Her key responsibilities include:

- Coordinating day-to-day study activities
- Supporting participants throughout the trial
- Maintaining a safe, welcoming, and well-organised research environment
- Ensuring all work meets Good Clinical Practice standards



Abitha Nair, Early-Phase Trial Coordinator for CF at NICRF

"I am passionate about improving access to innovative treatments and creating a supportive research environment for both participants and research teams"



Learners participating in the Delivering Clinical Trials module

POWERING CLINICAL TRIALS THROUGH EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

iREACH Health is strengthening NI's clinical research workforce through high-quality training and experience opportunities.

- Twenty-five QUB MSc Experimental Medicine students recently visited the NICRF to learn about study setup, consent, and patient involvement. Training pathways have also expanded through QUB's new MSc in Biomedical and Clinical Research at WWIEM.
- The NICRF's nursing placement programme - launched during the 2020 NOVAVAX trial - now offers a structured 2-day placement for QUB and Open University students. Participants gain practical experience with multidisciplinary teams in respiratory and vision studies. NICRF hosts around eight nursing students each year.

QUB nursing students - Contact NICRF to enquire about placements.



NICRF staff lead a practical session



Colum Carmody, who completed a placement at NICRF as part of his Open University Nursing degree.

CLINICAL TRIALS TRAINING MODULE



The "Delivering Clinical Trials - From Protocol to Patient" module is underway this semester, giving learners a clear introduction to trial design, set-up, and delivery. This year's intake has grown to 45 students.



The programme covers essentials including Good Clinical Practice, trial planning, screening and consent, recruitment, data management, and oversight. Participants work with real trial protocols, complete group tasks, and take part in a practical sessions. Engagement has been excellent, with learners gaining a strong grounding in both the theory and operations of clinical trial delivery.



The next iteration of the module will begin in January 2027, and will available for registration on the QUB short course webpage later this year.



Professor Judy Bradley, Director of The NICRF, Professor Sir Ian Greer, VC of QUB, and Bernie Boyle, COO of iREACH Health.

ADVANCING VISION RESEARCH

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A £1.2 million grant from the Wolfson Foundation is set to support the development of a state-of-the-art ophthalmology suite within iREACH Health, accelerating eye research and translation of new treatments into clinical trials.

The funding will enable the creation of a specialist ophthalmology suite within iREACH Health will facilitate advanced eye research focused on ageing, early disease pathology and the impact of conditions such as multiple sclerosis, Down syndrome and Alzheimer's on eyesight.

[Click here](#) for more.

"This investment from the Wolfson Foundation is a major boost for iREACH Health and for research infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The new ophthalmology suite strengthens our ability to deliver high-quality clinical research at pace and scale, supporting collaboration across the health service, academia, and industry for the benefit of patients."

Professor Judy Bradley, Director of NICRF and CEO of iREACH Health

THANK YOU ROISIN, FOR EVERYTHING!

Roisin Martin retired in December 2025 after an exceptional career, having been with the NICRF from its very beginning. As Senior Business & Operations Manager, Roisin played a pivotal role in shaping and supporting the organisation's growth, providing unwavering commitment, expertise and leadership throughout the years.



Thank you, Roisin, for your leadership, wisdom, and the fun you brought to the team.

Her dedication and tireless efforts laid the foundations on which so much of our work has been built, and without her contribution, iREACH Health would not be possible.

Roisin's legacy will continue to be felt across the clinical research ecosystem of Northern Ireland. On behalf of everyone at iREACH Health, thank you, Roisin, for your invaluable contribution. We wish you a retirement filled with joy, relaxation, and new adventures. You have earned it!