

ABHI

**2022 NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:
HEALTHTECH'S MANIFESTO**

ABOUT ABHI

ABHI is the UK's leading industry association for health technology (HealthTech).

ABHI supports the HealthTech community to save and enhance lives. Members, including both multinationals and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), supply devices and diagnostics from syringes and wound dressings to surgical robots and digitally enhanced technologies. We represent the industry to stakeholders, such as the government, NHS and regulators.

HealthTech plays a key role in supporting delivery of healthcare and is a significant contributor to the UK's economic growth. HealthTech is now the largest employer in the broader Life Sciences sector, employing 138,100 people in 4,140 companies, with a combined turnover of £27.6bn. The industry has enjoyed growth of around 5% in recent years. ABHI's 320 members account for approximately 80% of the sector by value.



OUR HEALTHTECH MANIFESTO

Since the last Northern Ireland Assembly elections, it is fair to say the world is a very different place. The United Kingdom has left the European Union and nowhere has that been more keenly felt than in Northern Ireland. The pandemic pushed already stretched health and care services to the limit and pressures on global supply chains have caused us to question the resilience and sustainability of our own.

Alongside these challenges there are opportunities to reset our approach to innovation and how it can support both the work we need to do in the immediate turn and ensure our health security and prosperity for the future.

HealthTech has a central role to play, from its part in rapidly delivering on the promise of “digital,” earlier and more accurate diagnosis, innovations that can treat patients more rapidly with reduced length of stay and in different settings, to established HealthTech continuing to deliver high quality, cost effective care for thousands of HSC patients every day.

This Manifesto lays out four small ideas, which, taken together, can make a big contribution to helping the HSC address its immediate challenges, and support Northern Ireland to develop and expand an important, innovation driven industrial sector that is capable of thriving in the global marketplace.



ON SPREADING INNOVATION

Northern Ireland is home to 70 HealthTech companies, employing 2,530 people. The region is uniquely located affording access to both the UK and EU market, has a strong record of innovation in the sector and an international reputation in data security. From this base there is the opportunity to improve the engagement of our indigenous companies with academia, the HSC and other elements of the Northern Irish innovation landscape to foster a spirit of collaboration and improve the health and wealth of the region. Mutual benefits would accrue from the rapid uptake of innovative products and the creation of high-quality jobs in the research, regulation, manufacturing and distribution of HealthTech.



#1

ABHI believes that Northern Ireland should create a formal integrated Academic Health Sciences System including the HSC, academia and industry.



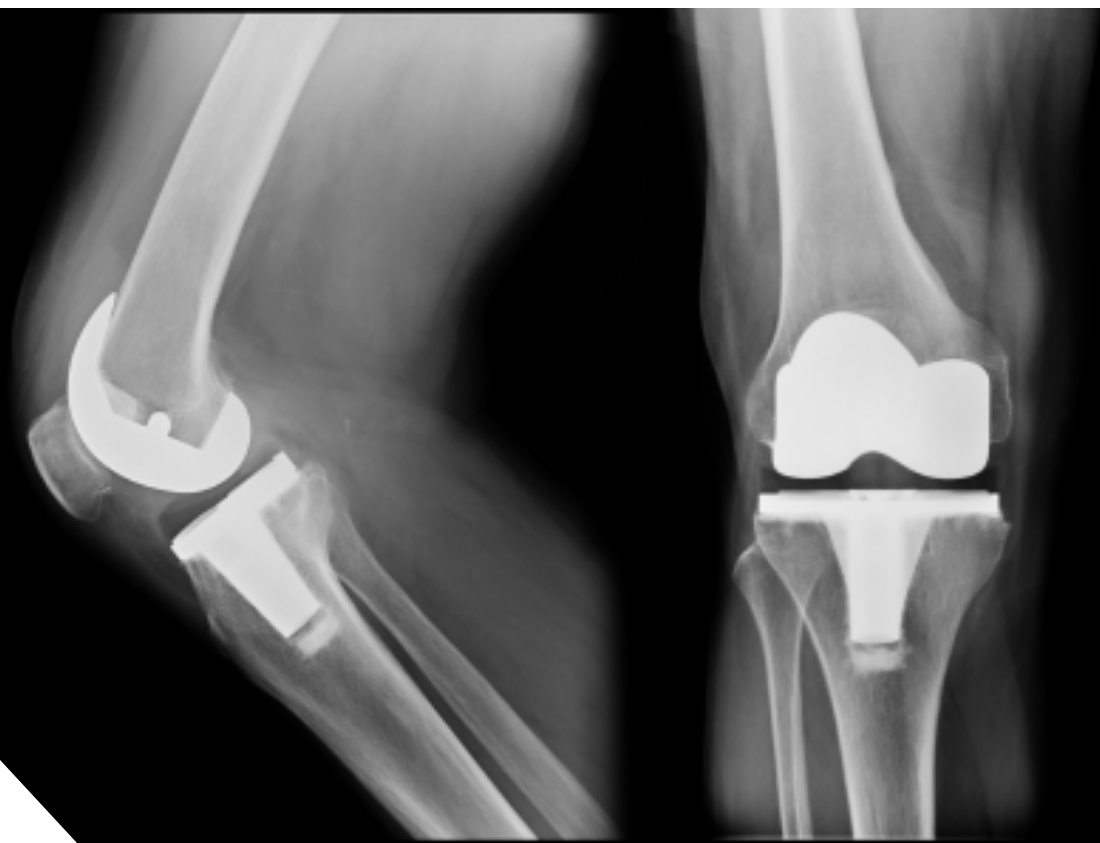
ON TACKLING THE ELECTIVE BACKLOG

Approaching the election, waiting time figures in Northern Ireland show over 350,000 people waiting for a first consultant appointment, over 160,000 for surgery and over 147,000 for diagnostic tests. Backlogs are a reality across the world and the HealthTech industry is working alongside health systems to address them. Alongside the importance of understanding planning assumptions to ensure adequate product supply in the face of increased global demand and supply chain pressures, the industry is going further. From developing technologies that allow more and earlier diagnosis to be carried out in the community, to innovations that reduce surgery time and length of stay and those that can improve infection prevention and control to create clean, cold elective surgical hubs. HealthTech has a critical role to play in reducing waits across entire clinical pathways from diagnosis to rehabilitation. Companies can also offer practical, logistical solutions aimed at, for example, improving theatre throughput or delivering managed services to free up hospital staff and improve productivity.



#2

ABHI believes that the HSC should convene a taskforce comprising operational service leaders, clinicians and industry to agree a collaborative approach to tackling the backlog in diagnostic and elective care.



ON DATA SHARING

One of the great opportunities for us to realise our ambition to become the most innovation friendly health and care system in the world, is through the use of data. Harnessing the power of the data it holds to improve the treatment of individuals and provide a testbed for research into new treatments is a noble ambition.

We understand that people are anxious about how their private and personal information is used, and the basis for health and care data ownership and consent must be transparent. The first step is gaining the confidence of the people it serves.



#3

ABHI believes that funding should be made available for a public communications programme, informing citizens of the benefits to themselves and others of sharing data in the development and adoption of new technologies and treatments.



ON REGULATION OF HEALTHTECH

The way health technologies are regulated is changing, both as a result of Brexit, where there now needs to be a new conformity process for the UK, and changes to the European system which is moving to a new Medical Device and In Vitro Diagnostic Medical Device Regulation. Under the terms of the Protocol, patients in Northern Ireland can continue to receive technologies that are CE marked. This arrangement protects the access of patients in the region to all existing HealthTech and avoids costs for manufacturers who may choose not to place some products on the GB market in the future. The unilateral recognition of CE marking should continue and similar arrangements should be considered with other jurisdictions. Additionally, the regulation of HealthTech continues to evolve across the world, taking account of the pace of development of technologies, whilst ensuring a robust and considered balance between risk and benefit. The challenges faced by industry and regulators alike in this ever changing environment are serious and significant. Innovative technologies need innovative regulation and Northern Ireland is uniquely positioned to be a regulatory powerhouse given its unfettered access to both the GB and European markets, whilst also enjoying a global reputation in cybersecurity. A focus on regulatory science offers significant opportunities for the region to be at the forefront of advances in the discipline globally.



#4

ABHI believes that Northern Ireland should continue to unilaterally accept CE marking indefinitely and establish a Centre of Excellence in Regulatory Science and Innovation.



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