



Healthcare

2026 Salary Guide, Northern Ireland

Healthcare Market Overview

Northern Ireland's healthcare sector enters 2026 under continued and well-documented strain, driven by sustained workforce shortages, rising patient demand, and ongoing system pressures across both public and private care settings. Demand for healthcare professionals remains exceptionally high across all levels, including nursing, social care, allied health, and support roles. This is being driven not only by current service pressures, but also by long-term demographic trends, with an ageing population continuing to increase demand for care services. One in six people in Northern Ireland are aged over 65, with this projected to rise further by 2030. At the same time, system-wide challenges including waiting lists, delayed discharges, and pressure on emergency departments continue to place additional strain on already stretched staffing resources.

Workforce Shortages & Vacancy Levels

Workforce shortages remain the most significant challenge facing the healthcare sector in Northern Ireland in 2026. Recruitment difficulties persist across key areas including nursing and midwifery, social care and support workers, as well as GP and community services. There are thousands of vacancies across Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, alongside additional shortages within private care homes and domiciliary care services, highlighting the ongoing pressure on workforce capacity. This is not a short-term recruitment issue, but a structural workforce challenge driven by an ageing population, workforce attrition, and increasing demand for services continuing to impact service delivery across Northern Ireland.

Retention, Pay & Workforce Pressures

Retention remains a critical concern, with many healthcare workers leaving the sector due to:

- High levels of stress and burnout
- Workload pressures
- Pay disparities compared to other UK regions

Northern Ireland healthcare workers continue to be among the lowest paid in the UK under Agenda for Change structures, contributing to ongoing dissatisfaction and previous industrial action. At the same time, increases in minimum wage and wider cost-of-living pressures while positive for employees are adding financial strain to care providers, particularly within the private sector.

Social Care & Support Worker Challenges

Shortages in social care and support worker roles remain particularly acute. Key contributing factors include:

- Relatively low pay compared to job demands
- High emotional and physical workload
- Accessibility challenges in rural areas
- Limited progression pathways

These shortages are contributing directly to wider system pressures, including delayed hospital discharges and increased demand on acute services.

International Recruitment & Regulation

International recruitment continues to play a vital role in sustaining workforce levels, with ongoing efforts to attract healthcare workers from overseas. However, recruitment pipelines can be impacted by:

- Visa processing timelines
- Regulatory requirements
- Policy changes affecting sponsorship and migration

These factors create uncertainty for employers attempting to plan long-term workforce strategies.

Technology, AI & Digital Transformation

Digital transformation remains a key focus within the sector. The rollout of the Encompass electronic patient record system across HSC Trusts represents a major step toward a fully integrated digital care system. In addition, continued investment in digital health, AI-assisted diagnostics, and virtual GP services aims to improve efficiency and reduce pressure on frontline services. While these innovations offer significant potential, their long-term impact on workforce demand and service delivery is still developing.

Workforce Solutions & Future Approach

Addressing workforce challenges in healthcare will require long-term, sustainable solutions rather than short-term fixes. Key priorities for 2026 include:

- Staff retention, ensuring experienced employees are supported and developed
- Expanding recruitment pipelines through education, return-to-work programmes, and international hiring
- Streamlining onboarding processes while maintaining compliance standards
- Investment in training and qualifications, improving access to careers within the sector. A balanced approach across these areas will be essential to stabilising the workforce and supporting future growth.

2026 Outlook

The outlook for Northern Ireland's healthcare sector in 2026 remains challenging but critical.

Demand for services will continue to grow, driven by demographic changes and ongoing system pressures. At the same time, workforce shortages, retention issues, and financial constraints will remain key barriers to stability.

However, there are clear opportunities for progress through:

- Continued investment in digital transformation
- Development of workforce pipelines
- Greater focus on retention and staff wellbeing
- Strategic use of both local and international talent

Healthcare remains an essential service that underpins society as a whole. Ensuring its sustainability will require ongoing collaboration between government, providers, and workforce partners to support both immediate needs and long-term growth.

Healthcare Salary Guide	Low	Average	Good
Residential Care			
Director of Nursing	£79,000	£92,000	£120,000
Assistant Director of Nursing	£76,000	£78,000	£81,000
Clinical Nurse Manager	£46,500	£49,000	£53,400
Senior Staff Nurse	£42,500	£44,500	£48,000
Staff Nurse Day	£35,500	£38,250	£41,000
Staff Nurse Night	£37,800	£41,250	£43,500
Healthcare Assistant Day			
1 - 2 years	£24,785	£25,500	£27,250
3+ years	£25,500	£26,750	£28,825
Healthcare Assistant Night			
1 - 2 years	£24,785	£26,825	£28,750
3+ years	£27,000	£28,500	£31,250
Senior Healthcare Assistant			
Activities Coordinator	£25,250	£28,250	£29,925
1 - 2 years	£25,250	£28,250	£29,925
3+ years	£26,250	£29,255	£31,200
Human Resource Manager	£50,000	£55,000	£57,100
Human Resource Administrator	£25,500	£27,500	£31,250
Reception/ Administrator	£29,500	£32,200	£34,000
Catering and Household			
Head/ Senior Chef	£40,000	£45,000	£47,000
Chef	£32,000	£38,000	£39,500
Kitchen Porter	£24,785	£25,350	£25,350
Catering Assistant	£24,785	£25,500	£25,800
Housekeeper/ Cleaner	£24,785	£25,500	£25,800



For further information contact:

Wes McCullough
Recruitment Consultant - Permanent

 028 91422 190

 wes@excelrecruitment.com

 www.excelhealthcare.com



Dublin Office:

The Capel Building, Mary's Abbey, Dublin 7, D07 DH99

Cork Office:

9 Parliament St Centre, Co. Cork, T12 X4YT

Kildare Office:

Unit C3, Wolfe Tone House, Naas Town Centre, Co. Kildare, W91 C8X0

Galway Office:

7a Raven's Terrace, Fr. Griffin road, Galway, H91THF9

Belfast Office:

Suite 301, Arthur House 41 Arthur Street Belfast BT1 4GB