

NOCA STRATEGY 2026-2029

Trusted Data Insights
Improved Outcomes



NOCA National Office of
Clinical Audit



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“Our new strategy sets out how NOCA will continue to grow as a trusted national provider of clinical audits and registries, working with key partners to innovate and deliver new solutions to improve patient outcomes.”

Message from the Clinical Director and Executive Director

Modern healthcare systems are increasingly complex, resource-constrained and under growing public scrutiny. In this environment, impartial, objective evaluations based on audit findings that drive quality improvements, support patient safety, and strengthen accountability are more important than ever. Independent national clinical audits demonstrate maturity in a healthcare system that prioritises and invests in patient safety and improvement, and is willing to be transparent and held to account by its service users.

This strategy marks a new chapter for the National Office of Clinical Audit (NOCA). Our previous strategies focused on establishing the expertise, standards and infrastructure required to develop and manage a suite of national clinical audits and registries across both public and private healthcare providers in Ireland.

Since we published our first strategy in 2016, the number of national clinical audits and registries carried out by NOCA has grown from 5 to 17, with a further 2 audit feasibility studies nearing completion. NOCA has developed significant national expertise in audit methodology and standards development, data science, information governance, national implementation, information technology (IT) systems and interfacing, audit promotion, stakeholder engagement, research, innovation, audit management and governance, as well as working in partnership with Patient and Public Interest (PPI) representatives and organisations.

Additionally, NOCA now participates across more than 20 national committees and working groups in partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE), Department of Health, academic organisations and international collaborators. We have established important relationships with organisations in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Australia and the Netherlands, supporting our commitment to continual improvement and innovation.

As healthcare becomes increasingly data-driven through digitisation of healthcare records, artificial intelligence (AI), interoperability and the European Health Data Space Regulation requirements, strong partnerships across the healthcare data ecosystem in Ireland and internationally will be vital.

While independence remains fundamental to NOCA's credibility and public value, improvement depends on partnership. NOCA will continue to work closely with the HSE, the Department of Health, healthcare providers, clinical leaders, patients and the public to ensure that audit findings support shared learning and translate into practical, measurable improvements in care.

Our new strategy sets out how NOCA will continue to grow as a trusted national provider of clinical audits and registries, working with key partners to innovate and deliver new solutions to improve patient outcomes. We are grateful to everyone who contributed their expertise and perspectives during the development of this strategy and we look forward to working together to implement it successfully.



Dr Brian Creedon
Clinical Director
NOCA



Collette Tully
Executive Director
NOCA

Message from our Patient and Public Interest Representatives

Over the lifetime of the previous NOCA strategy (2021–2025), the role of PPI within NOCA has continued to mature and strengthen. NOCA has long recognised that meaningful partnership with patients and the public improves the quality, relevance and impact of national clinical audit.

PPI representatives in NOCA contribute not only through sharing lived experience, but also through active participation in governance, audit development, reporting, recommendations and strategic direction. PPI representatives participate at Board level and across audit governance structures, helping to ensure that audits focus on the issues that matter most to patients and families.

True partnership means more than consultation. It means sharing decision-making, shaping priorities, and ensuring that recommendations lead to meaningful improvements in care. NOCA has led the way in embedding this approach within national clinical audit, and this strategy commits to further strengthening and diversifying PPI involvement across all areas of our work.

We will continue to advocate for stronger and earlier involvement of PPI representatives in audit design, reporting and implementation. We will also continue to ensure that audit findings remain accessible and understandable to the public through clear communication, plain language summaries and meaningful public engagement.

Over the lifetime of this strategy, NOCA will continue to strengthen its PPI structures, support greater diversity in representation, and ensure that the voice of PPI remains central to audit design, governance and improvement.



Brigid Doherty
PPI representative
NOCA Governance
Board



Iryna Pokhilo
PPI representative
NOCA Governance
Board

“PPI representatives in NOCA contribute not only through sharing lived experience, but also through active participation in governance, audit development, reporting, recommendations and strategic direction.”



“NOCA works closely with the HSE National Centre for Clinical Audit and other national clinical audit providers to advance and promote national clinical audit.”



About NOCA

NOCA was established in 2012 to set the standards and manage a programme of national clinical audits. NOCA is funded by the HSE via the Office of the Chief Clinical Officer. NOCA is based in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and governed by an independent voluntary Board. New NOCA audits and registries are commissioned by the HSE. NOCA then develops and implements these national clinical audits and registries in both public and private healthcare providers in Ireland.

NOCA works in partnership with the HSE, Department of Health, healthcare providers and other key stakeholders to measure care and outcomes against agreed standards, support providers to benchmark their performance and identify opportunities for improvement. NOCA data are also used for policy development, research and service planning. NOCA works closely with the HSE National Centre for Clinical Audit and other national clinical audit providers to advance and promote national clinical audit.

Recommendations arising from NOCA's national audits and registries are grounded in robust data, evidence-based methodologies and the expertise of the multidisciplinary teams that lead and govern each audit programme.

Since 2012, NOCA has developed significant organisational capability and infrastructure to support the development, management and promotion of national clinical audits and registries at scale while maintaining best practice standards in governance, quality assurance and information management.

Over time, NOCA's role has evolved beyond data collection and reporting. NOCA now provides national expertise across clinical audit methodology, governance, implementation, information governance, public reporting, stakeholder engagement, quality assurance and research. Increasingly, NOCA also plays an important role as a trusted national advisor supporting healthcare quality improvement, accountability and system learning.

STRATEGY 2026-2029



OUR VISION

Excellent healthcare for Ireland
shaped by good information.



OUR MISSION

Manage a portfolio of high-quality national
clinical audits which inform:

- the public, including service users, about how specific areas of the healthcare system are performing
- healthcare professionals, management and policy-makers of the quality of care being provided according to recognised standards, and of areas requiring improvement.



STRATEGIC AMBITION (2026-2029)

Position NOCA as a core national data and quality infrastructure, enabling more timely, data-driven improvement and accountability across the Irish healthcare system, aligned with national policy, service priorities and system capacity.



OUR VALUES

Our work and our relationships with stakeholders will be underpinned by these values:



INDEPENDENCE

NOCA is governed by an independent Board which operates as an honest and objective commentator on the quality of healthcare regardless of findings or sources of funding. This independence enables NOCA to provide objective assurance while working constructively with partners across the healthcare system to support improvement.



TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

NOCA is accountable to the public for its decisions and actions and operates in accordance with principles of good governance. We are committed to transparent public reporting, managed through agreed governance arrangements, so that audit findings are shared responsibly, accessibly and with a clear focus on improvement.



INTEGRITY

We carry out our work in the interests of patients and service users receiving care within the Irish healthcare system.



EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

We hold ourselves to the highest standards while continually seeking opportunities to improve.



PARTNERSHIP

We work collaboratively with stakeholders nationally and internationally to improve healthcare quality and patient outcomes. Partnership with the HSE and Department of Health is central to translating audit findings into improvement across the health system.

OUR ENABLERS

The delivery of our strategy will be supported by four key enablers:

OUR PEOPLE

NOCA's multidisciplinary team brings expertise across clinical audit methodology, governance, clinical practice, data science, information governance, digital systems, implementation, communications, quality assurance and research. NOCA will continue to foster a culture of purposeful work, collaboration, innovation and professional development, recognising that our people are central to the organisation's success.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The NOCA Audit Platform provides a strong foundation for future interoperability, integration with electronic health records, enhanced analytics and near real-time dashboard reporting. NOCA will continue to work closely with national partners to maximise opportunities arising from digital transformation and the evolving national health data infrastructure.

OUR STANDARDS

NOCA has developed robust standards supporting the development, management and governance of national audits and registries. These standards incorporate regulatory requirements alongside NOCA's own best practice frameworks and underpin the reliability, transparency and quality of NOCA's outputs. NOCA will continue to evolve and strengthen these standards in response to the changing needs of the healthcare system.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership and collaboration remain central to NOCA's approach and future success. NOCA works closely with clinicians, healthcare providers, policy-makers, researchers, advocacy groups, PPI representatives and international partners to support improvement, innovation and shared learning.

Through the implementation of its PPI roadmap, NOCA has continued to strengthen and mature patient and public involvement across the organisation. PPI representatives play an important role in helping to ensure that NOCA audits what matters, supports accountability for improvement, and uses information to promote patient empowerment and public understanding of healthcare quality.

NOCA will continue to strengthen national and international partnerships to support the ongoing development of Ireland's healthcare data ecosystem and to advance the role of national clinical audit in improving patient care.

WHAT WE ACHIEVED 2021–2025



Over the lifetime of the 2021–2025 strategy, NOCA significantly expanded its national portfolio, capabilities and impact. This work established strong foundations for future development and positioned NOCA as a trusted national organisation within Ireland’s healthcare system.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THIS PERIOD INCLUDED:

- growth from 10 national clinical audits and registries to 17
- development of the NOCA Audit Platform supporting scalable national audit infrastructure
- expansion beyond acute care including rehabilitation, palliative care and dementia
- implementation of a mature PPI roadmap embedding patient and public involvement across governance and reporting
- development of national dashboards and enhanced reporting capability
- strengthening of national and international partnerships
- participation across more than 20 national committees and working groups
- expansion of patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) and patient-focused reporting approaches
- publication of two NOCA impact reports.

The Changing Healthcare Environment

Ireland's healthcare system is undergoing significant transformation. Sláintecare reforms, regionalisation, digital transformation and increased expectations around transparency and accountability are reshaping how healthcare services are delivered, monitored and improved.

The implementation of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 and the increasing emphasis on quality assurance and public accountability reinforce the importance of trusted national clinical audit. At the same time, healthcare providers are facing increasing pressures relating to workforce, capacity, access, waiting lists and sustainability.

The emergence of the European Health Data Space Regulation, increasing interoperability requirements, digital health records and connected care pathways present significant opportunities for healthcare quality improvement and national clinical audit.

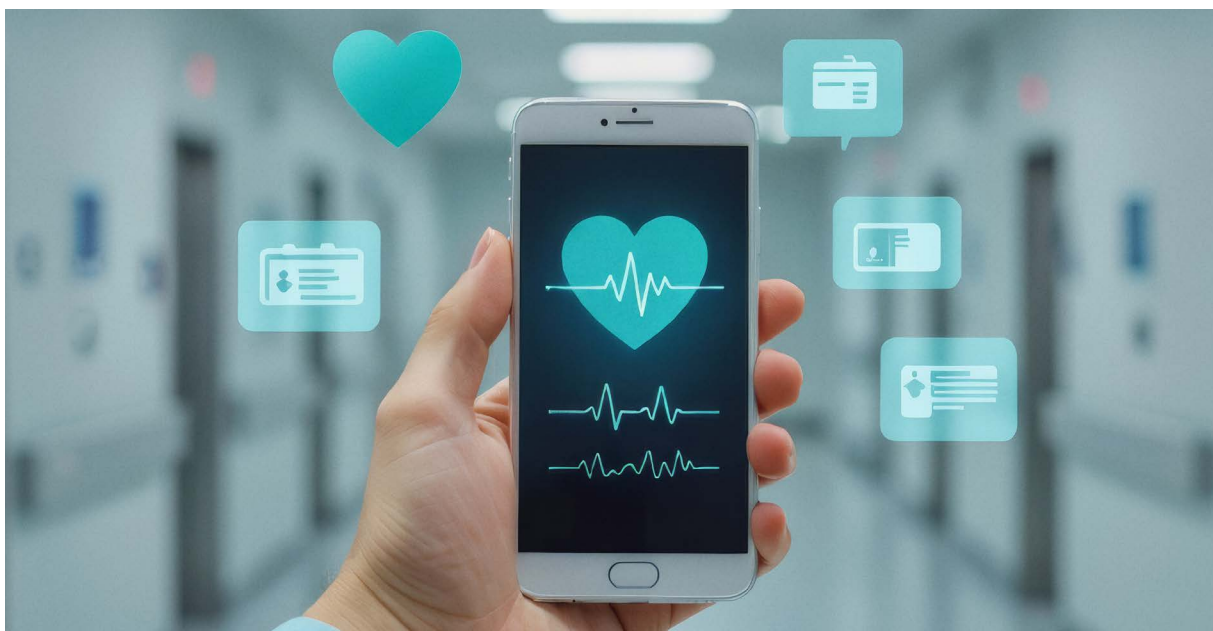
Healthcare performance is now measured not only through traditional clinical outcomes, but also through access, equity, patient-reported outcomes, patient experience, operational efficiency and sustainability. This creates both

opportunities and expectations for future national audit development.

Future healthcare measurement will require a whole-pathway perspective across prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and follow-up care. Environmental sustainability considerations are also likely to become increasingly relevant within healthcare quality measurement frameworks. In parallel, AI and advanced analytics present significant opportunities to support automation, insight generation and operational efficiency across national clinical audit programmes, while requiring robust governance, transparency and appropriate human oversight.

National clinical audits are becoming increasingly critical national infrastructure, supporting quality improvement, service redesign, public accountability, benchmarking, policy development and population health planning.

Stakeholders increasingly expect near real-time intelligence through dashboards, benchmarking tools and early warning indicators rather than retrospective reporting alone. This will require continued evolution in data collection, analytics and reporting approaches.



Development of the Strategy

In addition to our assessment of the changing healthcare environment, NOCA undertook extensive engagement with stakeholders across the healthcare system to inform the development of this strategy, including healthcare providers and managers, policy-makers, clinical leads, governance committee members, researchers, PPI representatives and international partners.



What our Stakeholders Told us

Stakeholder feedback demonstrated strong support for NOCA's role as a trusted, independent source of national clinical audit and healthcare quality intelligence, while also highlighting clear expectations regarding future priorities, partnerships and opportunities for improvement.



What our Stakeholders Value

Our stakeholders have told us they value:

- clear public communication and accessible reporting, including the use of infographics and plain language summaries to make complex findings understandable and relevant
- high-quality, evidence-based audits that are independent, credible and capable of identifying systemic issues and supporting meaningful improvement
- transparency and public reporting, with national audit reports contributing to accountability across the healthcare system
- a strong quality improvement focus, with practical recommendations linked to measurable improvement rather than data collection alone
- meaningful stakeholder engagement and growing recognition of the importance of patient and public involvement within national clinical audit.

What our Stakeholders Need

Our stakeholders have told us they need:

- national clinical audit to support real-time insights through dashboards, benchmarking and earlier identification of system risks, while continuing to provide trusted independent assurance and evidence-based recommendations
- approaches to achieving comprehensive and sustainable participation in national clinical audits and registries, recognising the importance of complete and representative data for benchmarking, quality improvement and national assurance
- reducing audit burden through greater automation, interoperability and integration with electronic health records, supporting the principle that data should be collected once and used many times
- stronger implementation follow-up to ensure that audit recommendations lead to measurable improvement in patient outcomes and experiences
- greater opportunities for shared learning nationally and locally, including mechanisms to identify, evaluate and spread best practice
- stronger integration of patient experience and the human impact of care within audit findings and reporting
- earlier and more consistent communication with stakeholders to support collaboration, shared understanding and proactive system improvement
- greater co-design of audits and measures with PPI representatives from the earliest stages of development
- closer collaboration across audit, advocacy, research and policy communities to better understand persistent risks and emerging trends within the healthcare system.

Overall, engagement findings demonstrated strong confidence in NOCA's role and future direction, with 91% positive sentiment regarding NOCA's contribution to healthcare quality improvement and accountability within the Irish healthcare system.



Strategic Alignment with Key Partners

This strategy has been informed by, and will support implementation of, wider national policy and partner strategies, including:



NOCA will continue to align its work with HSE-led prioritisation, Sláintecare objectives, affordability, workforce and digital capacity, and the overall readiness of the healthcare system to participate in and act on national clinical audit.

NOCA STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026–2029

Our strategic priorities are designed to strengthen NOCA's role to support safer, more effective and more accountable healthcare across Ireland.



**DRIVING IMPROVEMENT
THROUGH AUDIT**



**DATA, TECHNOLOGY AND
INTEROPERABILITY**



**INNOVATION, ANALYTICS AND
FUTURE CAPABILITY**



**STRENGTHENING
GOVERNANCE, PARTICIPATION
AND PARTNERSHIPS**



Driving Improvement through Audit

We will strengthen the impact of national clinical audit by ensuring that audit findings support measurable improvement in patient care, patient experience and healthcare outcomes. Delivery of these priorities will be undertaken in partnership with the HSE and aligned with national policy direction, Sláintecare, affordability and overall system capacity.

KEY PRIORITIES INCLUDE

- reviewing future indicator sets through an outcomes, access and equity lens
- strengthening the integration of patient-reported outcome and experience measures where feasible
- developing stronger recommendation tracking, implementation and evaluation processes
- ensuring that recommendations are measurable, evidence based and linked to improvement methodologies
- supporting the use of audit data for quality improvement, research, service planning and population health improvement
- expanding the use of audit intelligence to support earlier identification of risks and opportunities for improvement
- working with the HSE and healthcare providers to strengthen feedback loops between audit findings, quality improvement planning and measurable implementation.



Data, Technology and Interoperability

We will continue to modernise NOCA's data and technology infrastructure to support more efficient, interoperable and responsive national clinical audit systems.

KEY PRIORITIES INCLUDE

- developing interoperable audit datasets aligned to national standards and digital health reform
- increasing automation of data collection through integration with electronic health records and national systems
- supporting secure linkage across national datasets using the Individual Health Identifier
- expanding dashboarding, benchmarking and more timely reporting approaches
- supporting the development of more connected and integrated healthcare quality intelligence across the healthcare system
- aligning technology developments with HSE digital priorities, affordability and implementation capacity.



Innovation, Analytics and Future Capability

We will strengthen NOCA's capability to support innovation, advanced analytics and future-focused approaches to national clinical audit and healthcare improvement.

KEY PRIORITIES INCLUDE

- exploring the responsible use of AI to support analytics, reporting, operational efficiency and audit development
- supporting ethical, transparent and human-centred approaches to AI and emerging technologies
- strengthening organisational capability in analytics, digital innovation and data-informed improvement methodologies
- supporting innovation in reporting, quality improvement and stakeholder engagement approaches
- ensuring that innovation is aligned with national governance, data protection, digital health strategy and system readiness
- monitoring emerging national and international developments to ensure that NOCA remains responsive to future healthcare and technology change.



Strengthening Governance, Participation and Partnerships

We will continue to strengthen the governance, sustainability and national reach of NOCA to support high-quality independent audit and long-term system impact.

KEY PRIORITIES INCLUDE

- reviewing governance arrangements to reflect NOCA's growth, maturity and evolving role within the healthcare system
- exploring approaches to strengthen and support national participation in clinical audits and registries, including contributing national discussions regarding participation models, data quality, policy direction and system readiness
- continuing to support and develop the people who contribute to NOCA's success, including staff, clinical leads, governance committees, audit coordinators and PPIs
- supporting HSE-led prioritisation and commissioning of new audits and registries, aligned with Sláintecare, affordability, patient safety priorities and overall system capacity
- strengthening partnerships with the HSE, Department of Health, healthcare providers, policy-makers, researchers, patients, and international organisations
- continuing to embed PPI across NOCA's work and strategic development

2030 SUCCESS FOR NOCA



NOCA aims to be a recognised key partner in the Irish healthcare data ecosystem.



NOCA audits and registries contribute to measurable improvement of patient outcomes.



NOCA's infrastructure and expertise is recognised as a national asset.



NOCA's independence remains a defining strategic strength



NOCA's audit and registry datasets are interoperable with other data collections, and data collection is increasingly collected from digital sources.



NOCA's reports are timely and relevant to support local, regional and national improvement, planning and performance.



NOCA has implemented innovative and reliable AI solutions.



NOCA has a mature and diverse PPI programme.



NOCA is recognised internationally for innovation and quality.



NOCA is a great place to work.

Strategy Implementation and Governance

Delivery of this strategy will be supported through an annual operational planning process, with clear priorities, actions and owners. Oversight of the strategy implementation will be provided through NOCA's established governance arrangements, with progress and performance reviewed regularly by the NOCA Governance Board.

NOCA will continue to work with the HSE and other partners to ensure that annual plans align with national priorities, commissioning arrangements, available resources, system capacity and policy direction.

Public reporting and transparency will continue to be managed through agreed processes, including appropriate engagement with HSE oversight structures where required, while protecting the integrity and value of independent national clinical audit.

NOCA will publish periodic impact reports demonstrating the contribution of its audits and registries to drive quality improvements, ensure safety, and bolster accountability.

Recognising the pace of change across healthcare, digital transformation and policy reform, NOCA will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure that the strategy remains responsive, relevant and aligned to emerging healthcare priorities.

A mid-strategy review will be undertaken for the NOCA Governance Board to assess progress, identify emerging opportunities and challenges, and ensure continued alignment with the evolving healthcare environment and wider system reform.

“NOCA will continue to work with the HSE and other partners to ensure that annual plans align with national priorities, commissioning arrangements, available resources, system capacity and policy direction.”



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