



NORTHERN IRELAND
**ADVANCING
HEALTHCARE
AWARDS 2026**

INFORMATION SHEET

Please go to <https://aha.awardsplatform.com/> to register to enter and submit your entry on-line. The submission deadline is Monday 22 June.

KEY DATES

EXTENDED CLOSING DATE: Monday 22 June 2026

VIRTUAL JUDGING PANELS: Week commencing 14 September 2026

AWARDS CEREMONY: Thursday 22 October 2026 (Belfast)

VENUE: La Mon Hotel & Country Club, Belfast

CATEGORY SPONSORS



SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS



EVENT PARTNER



Advancing Healthcare Awards Northern Ireland 2026 for allied health professionals, healthcare scientists and those who work alongside them in support roles

The awards will be presented at a ceremony and dinner at La Mon Hotel & Country Club, Belfast on 22 October. The judges would like all entries to demonstrate how their work has had a significant impact on service delivery. Team entries that include support workers and assistant practitioners are welcomed – in particular, the Rising Star category. You may enter your project into only one category, but you can enter as many different projects as you like into different categories. All awards are open to AHPs and healthcare scientists working in any setting in Northern Ireland (with the exception of the Patricia Blackburn award for significant contribution). This year we have 9 awards plus the overall winner.

The award themes are:

Category 1

AWARD FOR SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Sponsored by the HSC Clinical Education Centre, Business Services Organisation



Category 2

AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

Sponsored by the Institute of Biomedical Science



Category 3

AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN CANCER CARE

Sponsored by Macmillan Cancer Support



Category 4

AWARD FOR MASTERS CLINICAL RESEARCH

Sponsored by the Ulster University, School Of Health Sciences



Category 5

RISING STAR AWARD

Sponsored by Unite the Union, NI Health Branch



Category 6

AWARD FOR CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Category 7

THE PATRICIA BLACKBURN AWARD FOR SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sponsored by HSC Leadership Centre, Business Services Organisation



Category 8

**AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE DELIVERY BY AN AHP
OR HEALTHCARE SCIENTIST WORKING OUTSIDE THE NHS**

Category 9

AWARD NOMINATED BY A PATIENT OR SERVICE USER

OVERALL WINNER

Chosen from the winners of each category and cannot be entered directly.

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Award for service improvement

Sponsored by the HSC Clinical Education Centre

This award aims to attract entries from those who have embraced the bigger picture in the health and wellbeing agenda and led the way in re-thinking and redesigning services to improve care from the point of view of patients, clients and their families. New models of care must be evidence-based and be centred on the individual. This recognises the crucial role of AHPs and healthcare scientists in driving forward service redesign to ensure safe, sustainable and effective quality services, provided by the right people in the right place at the right time.

Criteria

The judges will be looking for evidence of:

- The impact for patients, services and organisations including cost effectiveness.
- Sustainability and transferability
- Leadership and team working
- Making a difference to service user care that is more than levels of satisfaction
- Evidence of service user involvement and redesign

Submission questions

- Summarise the impact of your project (50 words)
- Now provide a fuller description of your project and relevant background work (200 words)
- What are the outcomes and benefits to patients, including sustainability? (200 words)
- How does it demonstrate leadership and team working skills? (100 words)
- How have you involved patients and communities? (100 words)
- How will it be sustained and what is the potential for transferability and scalability across organisations or services? (100 words)

Award for outstanding leadership

Sponsored by the Institute of Biomedical Science

A culture of high quality, continually improving, compassionate care and support must be underpinned by a new approach to collective and system leadership. A continuous learning culture and strong team working both within and across traditional healthcare boundaries is crucial to ensuring we deliver the best outcomes for our population of Northern Ireland.

This award is for leaders in the allied health professions and healthcare science at all levels who can demonstrate how they developed and used their skills to benefit our patients, clients and carers.

Criteria

The judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Leadership and partnership working
- The impact of leadership initiatives
- Commitment and resilience
- Impact of effective clinical leadership on enhancing quality of patient care and sound evaluation
- Awareness of budgets and the need for cost effectiveness

Submission questions

- Summarise the individual(or team's) leadership vision and its impact on improving patient care (50 words)
- Now provide a fuller description of the work and supporting evidence with reference to the above criteria - include any metrics or testimonials if appropriate (200 words)
- How does the individual (or team) demonstrate effective clinical leadership skills and engagement of relevant stakeholders and partners? (200 words)
- Describe the challenges faced - how has this individual (or team) shown resilience and what creative solutions have they applied (100 words)

Award for excellence in cancer care

Sponsored by Macmillan Cancer Support



This award aims to highlight outstanding practice in cancer services. These can be new initiatives which are already showing beneficial outcomes or more longstanding projects that have been thoroughly evaluated and which could be adopted elsewhere. It is open to AHPs and healthcare scientists working in any setting in Northern Ireland.

Criteria

The judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Evidence of impact must include how the views of service users (including their family, carers and so on) as well as other professionals, commissioners and /or service managers impacted your project
- Working alongside service users in the development of your project or service
- Partnership working that clearly shows effective communication and improved holistic input
- Clear return on investment and value for money, and any other benefits to overall health, education and social care
- Potential for wider implementation and benefits for many others.

Submission questions

- Describe your project and its impact (50 words)
- Describe how you developed the project, working with service users, colleagues and other key stakeholders (200 words)
- Outline how your project is successful in the engagement of relevant stakeholders and how service users are involved in the ongoing management and evaluation of the work (100 words)
- Outline the impact of the project and proof of successful outcomes including feedback from any of the stakeholders (200 words)
- What worked and what didn't? What lessons were learnt? In retrospect is there anything you would now do differently? How did you monitor and overcome any risks? (200 words)
- What potential is there for this work to be replicated for the benefit of many more? (100 words).

Award for Masters clinical research

Sponsored by Ulster University, School Of Health Sciences

This award aims to attract entries from those who have undertaken a Masters research project through the Advancing Practice programme at Ulster University in the last 2 years (2023-2025) or are due to submit for September 2026.

The panel will be particularly interested in research where there is a clearly articulated opportunity for the research to have impact at a service level, improving patient care and informing local, national and potentially international clinical practice. The award will support the successful candidate to move to publication to disseminate the research as widely as possible to have as wide an impact as possible and encourage the move to publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Criteria

The judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Benefit to the individual patient, the service, the organisation
- Opportunities for transferability of the research methodology into other clinical practice
- Clear evidence of independent research
- Ability to produce a clear document for publication

Submission questions

- Submit an abstract of your research (500 words: Background, Methods, Results, Conclusion)
- Provision of an impact statement: how your research could make an impact (300 words)
- Plan of local dissemination; what have you done, what are you planning to do (300 words)
- Submission of a draft paper for publication
- Potential journal/s identified for publication. Please provide the names of up to 3 potential journals.

Rising star award

Sponsored by Unite the Union, NI Health Branch

For this award we are inviting you to nominate a colleague or member of staff who has shown a level of initiative, skill and commitment that is truly exceptional. You may nominate anyone working in their role as an AHP, healthcare scientist or support worker for less than five years and who you and others recognise as a star in the making.

Criteria

This is an open award with no rigid criteria, so tell us their story. We are looking for people who stand out from the crowd and have already shown courage in meeting professional or personal challenges, displaying determination, creativity, intelligence and bravery; people who have continued to develop their skills and evidence-based practice since qualifying and flourished in whatever setting they have found themselves.

Submission questions

- Summarise why this person stands out from the crowd. (100 words)
- Have there been any personal or professional challenges that they have faced? (50 words)
- In what specific ways has this person matured professionally? (50 words)
- What do colleagues, managers and patients say about them? (50 words)
- How does this person show promise for the future? (50 words)

Award for creative and innovative practice

This award aims to attract entries from AHPs and healthcare scientists who have developed new, holistic and creative approaches to longstanding problems or found unconventional solutions to unexpected challenges. It is open to healthcare scientists and AHPs, including those in music, art and drama therapies working in any setting in Northern Ireland.

Criteria

The judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Evidence of impact to include how the views of service users (including their family and carers) as well as other professionals, commissioners and /or service managers impacted your project
- Working alongside service users in the initiation, creation and development of their work
- Partnership working that clearly shows effective communication and improved holistic input
- Clear return on investment and value for money, and any other benefits to overall health, education and social care
- Potential for wider implementation and benefits for many others.

Submission questions

- Describe your project and its impact (50 words)
- Describe how you developed the project working with service users, colleagues and other key stakeholders (200 words)
- Outline how your project is successful in the engagement of relevant stakeholders and how service users are involved in the ongoing management and evaluation of the work (100 words)
- Tell us more about the impact of your project and evidence of successful outcomes including feedback from stakeholders (200 words)
- What worked and what didn't? What lessons were learnt? In retrospect is there anything you would now do differently? How did you monitor and overcome any risks? (200 words)
- What potential is there for this work to be replicated for the benefit of many more? (100 words).

The Patricia Blackburn award for significant contribution and achievement

Sponsored by HSC Leadership Centre, Business Services Organisation

The award is in memory of Patricia Blackburn. Patricia was an orthoptist, an AHP commissioner in the legacy Southern Board and the Chief AHP Officer in the Department of Health. She was one of the very first people in an AHP post in Northern Ireland and instrumental in the development of the AHP community as we know it today. She was passionate about the work of the AHPs and dedicated to improving outcomes for patients. She was a true inspiration.



This award is a prestigious recognition to be given to an allied health professional who has made an outstanding and enduring contribution in their field of work of clear benefit to patient care. The award will be given to someone who has demonstrated exceptional talent, dedication, and impact, influencing and inspiring others to achieve excellence. The recipient will have made a profound impact on their profession and patient care, advancing knowledge, pushing boundaries, and setting new standards. Their work has likely influenced the development and progress of the entire field.

Criteria

The recipient will have:

- Made a profound and lasting impact on their profession
- Clear evidence of enduring benefit to patient care
- Influenced and inspired others working in health and social care
- Pushed boundaries and set new standards

Submission questions

- Summarise this person's career achievements in 50 words
- Now tell us more about the impact of their work (200 words)
- How have they influenced and inspired others? (100 words)
- What will be their enduring legacy? (100 words)

Award for outstanding service delivery by an AHP or healthcare scientist working outside the NHS

This award is to recognise the contribution to the health and well-being of the population from those employed outside the main health and social care system. It is to highlight their role in developing and delivering services that play an important part in the health of the community but are so often overlooked.

This award is open to AHPs and healthcare scientists working in private practice and charities.

Criteria

The judges will be looking for evidence of at least one or more of the following:

- Partnerships that clearly show the beneficial impact for patients and service users
- Positive patient experience
- Innovation
- Partnership with health and social care services
- Going above and beyond for patients

Submission questions

- Summarise why your work stands out from the crowd. (100 words)
- What has been the impact of your work on patient outcomes or quality of life? (100 words)
- Outline challenges your work has faced and how these have been addressed. (100 words)
- What potential is there for this work to be replicated for the benefit of many more? (100 words)

Award nominated by a patient or service user

For this award we are inviting patients or service users or their relatives to nominate an AHP, healthcare scientist, or a support staff member who has shown a level of compassion, initiative, skill and care that is truly exceptional.

Criteria

This is an open award with no rigid criteria, so tell us your story.

Submission questions

- Why was this person so special? (50 words)
- Give some specific examples of how they made a real difference to you (200 words)
- What is your message to them? (50 words)

Overall winner

The overall winner is chosen from among the winners of the main categories.

www.ahawards.co.uk



Award organisers:

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