

What does the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act mean? The FOI Act gives everyone the right to request information from public authorities. Public authorities include hospitals, health centres, health boards and health agencies. So the FOI Act applies to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust).

The FOI Act enables you to better understand better how the Trust works; how we spend public money; and how and why we make our decisions.

You can also get information from us under:

The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) which gives you the right to access your own personal information. The DPA covers businesses as well as public authorities. Ask us for our leaflets on getting access to your personal information and on how we use your information.

The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) which gives people access to environmental information. Like the FOI Act, the EIR are limited to information held by public authorities. Information on the EIR is available from the Information Commissioner (see contact details overleaf).

How do I get information about the Trust under the FOI Act? We put a lot of information on our website – www.niamb.co.uk as part of our Publication Scheme. Check it to see if what you want is there. You can download information from the website free of charge but if what you want isn't there or can't be downloaded, write to the address on the website.

Write to the address given at the end of this leaflet if you don't have access to the internet and want a paper copy of the guide to our Publication Scheme. You can also ask for information that is not included in the publication scheme.

All requests for information need to be in writing (by letter or email) with a return address so we can respond. Please help us by telling us as clearly as possible what information you want. We may contact you to understand what you want, so do make sure you give your contact details.

How long does it take to get the information? When we've received your written request for information, we have 20 working days to respond. We can extend that time in some cases. 'Working days' means Monday-Friday, but not bank holidays. If the information is part of our Publication Scheme, then you should get it within five working days.

Will you charge me for the information? You can download information from our website free of charge.

We'll also provide most other information free, but we may charge for photocopying and postage. If you request a large amount of information, we may have to charge you for the time taken to gather it. We will always tell you how much you have to pay so you can decide if you want to go ahead with your request.

If the cost is more than £450, we don't have to provide the information, even if you're willing to pay. This is covered in the FOI Appropriate Limit and Fees Regulations 2004.

An exception to this is EIR information. Even if the EIR information costs more than £450 to gather, we must gather it for you as long as you're prepared to pay.

What if the information I want is not available? The FOI Act only requires us to provide information we already hold. We will contact you and tell you what information we do hold that may help to answer your query.

Can I have anything I ask for? The FOI Act gives access to almost all information that a public body holds. We can withhold (keep back) some information under 'exemptions'.

These include information about national security and law enforcement or personal information about others. However, you can obtain your own personal information through the DPA. Ask us about DPA if you are seeking your personal information.

What if you refuse to give me information In most cases, except where we have a legal right not to say, we will tell you if we are withholding information and why, and who to contact if you are not happy about it. This may be the Information Commissioner (see details below). But you must contact us first to try to sort things before contacting the Commissioner. The Commissioner will want to see proof of that before getting involved. So talk to us first about any FOI concerns. We will try to help.

Where can I get more information about the FOI Act? You can contact the Information Commissioner as follows:

Website: www.ico.gov.uk
Phone: 0303 123 1114
Email: ni@ico.gsi.gov.uk
Post: 3RD Floor, 12 Cromac Place
Gasworks, Ormeau Road
Belfast, BT7 2JB

You can also find information and contact details on our website: www.niamb.co.uk You can phone us at the number provided below, but remember that requests for copies of information need to be in writing.

Corporate Manager
Information Department
NI Ambulance Service
Site 30, Knockbracken HC Park
Saintfield Road
BELFAST
BT8 8SG

Phone: 028 9040 0710
Fax: 028 9040 0908

Email: foi@nias.hscni.net

 Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



How the Freedom of Information Act affects Health and Social Care Services

Note – The guide outlines some of the main points of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. It is not a statement of the law.

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