

# Parliamentary Briefing: Support ‘My Right to Cardiac Arrest Recovery’

## What needs to change?

Surviving a cardiac arrest can result in a [range](#) of physical, neurological, cognitive, emotional, and social issues. These may not become apparent until after discharge from the hospital. At present, too many Survivors in Northern Ireland aren't being assessed for their health and social care needs beyond hospital. As a result, cardiac arrest survivors often struggle with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress – as do their families, caregivers, healthcare professionals and rescuers. This needs to change.

## What is a Cardiac Arrest?

An Out-of-hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) is an often-fatal condition where the heart stops beating and needs CPR +/- defibrillation. Annually, around 1,500 people in Northern Ireland suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest where resuscitation is attempted. At present, fewer than 1 in 10 people survive an out of hospital cardiac arrest. And yet, unlike rehabilitation services for a [stroke](#) or [heart attack](#), there is currently no formal care pathway for cardiac arrest survivors across the country.

## Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Everyone affected by involvement in a Cardiac Arrest, and the provision of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, must be able to access appropriate, ongoing, personalised support.
- ✓ All cardiac arrest survivors to be assessed prior to hospital discharge using [current guidelines](#), and to receive an individualised post cardiac arrest rehabilitation plan.

## Background

At Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK), we believe everyone has the right to make their best possible recovery after a cardiac arrest. That's why [we're campaigning](#) to improve the post-cardiac arrest support offered by the NHS.

A programme of rehabilitation, targeted to the individual's needs, improves quality of life, is [cost effective](#), and can reduce hospital readmissions.

“Survivors of a cardiac arrest require a system of care that is multi-disciplinary and does not end when the patient leaves the hospital.

Everyone affected by Cardiac Arrest has a right to recovery and rehabilitation, which we know is a key element of improving quality of life after cardiac arrest.”

James Cant, CEO, Resuscitation Council

Currently, there is no minimum level of follow-up applied equally across the country. Meaning that many patients are missing out on vital services helping them to a full recover.

## Who else is affected?

A cardiac arrest incident can have a huge impact upon all those involved, causing a ripple effect that often goes far beyond the person who's had the arrest. Being resuscitated, performing CPR or witnessing a cardiac arrest can be incredibly stressful. [Qualitative research](#) suggests that many '[co-survivors](#)' are dissatisfied with the lack of post- discharge information and poor continuity in healthcare services, and often express feelings of neglect.

## Progress achieved in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland began its journey towards improving survival rates for out of hospital cardiac arrests with the implementation of the [Community Resuscitation Strategy in 2014](#). The primary objective of this initiative was to empower communities by equipping them with vital life-saving skills. Great progress has been made, but there's still more to be done to ensure that everyone affected by involvement in a cardiac arrest has access to appropriate, ongoing, personalised support.

While there are internationally and nationally recognised guidelines for patient and family follow-up post cardiac arrest, there is significant variability in application across Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom. This results in a wide variation of access to rehabilitation services and psychological support for those affected by cardiac arrest, with many patients and families feeling abandoned.

## Resuscitation Council UK to publish Cardiac Arrest Survivor Quality Standard

Post cardiac arrest care is multi-disciplinary and requires coordinated support that does not end when the patient leaves the hospital. Patients must receive a care assessment prior to discharge, to plan their ongoing care and access to the specific help they need. Health and care systems across Northern Ireland must work in partnership to identify and reduce the gaps in accessing cardiac arrest rehabilitation services.

At RCUK, we are committed to ensuring optimal recovery for all cardiac arrest survivors and are publishing a national quality standard later this year. By advocating for its implementation across all the UK's health boards & integrated care boards, we aim for equitable care, granting every cardiac arrest survivor timely access to all the elements of aftercare they need for their recovery.

## Become a parliamentary advocate for cardiac arrest survivors

Resuscitation Council UK would like Members of the Legislative Assembly to step forward and become an advocate for cardiac arrest survivors. We want to see parliamentarians commit to meaningfully engaging with survivors and co-survivors within their constituency and represent their voices in parliament. We would be most grateful if you could express your interest in becoming an advocate by contacting [communications@resus.org.uk](mailto:communications@resus.org.uk).

## About us

Resuscitation Council UK is saving lives by developing guidelines, influencing policy, delivering courses, and supporting cutting-edge research. Through education, training and research, we're working towards the day when everyone in the country has the skills they need to save a life.