



# Spark Newsletter

*Issue No. 3 2025*

---

Spark Connect – National Innovation  
Awards – Spark Impact – Designer  
Spotlight

---







# Welcome

## Welcome to the Winter 2025 Edition of the Spark Newsletter

As the year comes to an end, we are delighted to bring you the final edition of the Spark Newsletter for 2025.

This has been a year of reflection and renewal as we experience one of the most profound evolutions of the health service in modern times. The integration of six health regions has fundamentally changed how we work and guided by the commitment, creativity and resilience of staff across the system, we collectively continue to drive meaningful change.

From grassroots ideas to system-wide improvements, we've seen remarkable innovation emerge from those closest to the challenges.

We've had a busy year and many events to look back on: new projects launched, collaborations strengthened, and a growing community of innovators stepping forward with solutions that make a real difference. In this edition, we celebrate those achievements, highlight stories from across the programme, and look ahead to what's possible in the year to come.

**Thank you for being part of this movement. Let's keep building, together.**

Warm regards,

**The HSE Spark Team**



# Public Service Transformation Week Spark Connect Events

During Public Service Transformation Week 2025, there was record-breaking engagement with the Spark Connect programme. Throughout the week, each region came alive with innovation events that showcased the power of community and collaboration. Here we provide a glance at some of those key events, nurturing innovation.

## Connect

A major highlight for us was the launch of the Connect Toolkit, designed to help teams spark meaningful conversations and drive innovation in their own settings. If you missed it, the toolkit is still available for download through the link below. This toolkit was brought to life through creativity and design thinking skills, true design in action.

[Digital Toolkit](#)[Connect Video](#)

## Spark Connect Round Up:

**110** Total Spark Connect Toolkits downloaded.

**225** Total Spark Connect Physical Toolkits posted out.

**5254** Total views on our “Interview with Innovator” Healthcare Professional Video Series.

**1210** Average organic impressions on each Spark Connect post.



# Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda

This event highlighted Spark Innovation Tools to inspire and assist teams on their project journey. Bringing together current project teams from medicine, nursing and and health and social care professions, this hands-on session progressed projects through journey mapping and human centred design focus.

## Med Day Trinity College Dublin

Each year, Trinity College Dublin medical students come together for this incredible, student-led event to raise vital funds for innovative healthcare projects. Med Day empowers the next generation of healthcare professionals to make a direct impact on patient care and health service improvement.

At HSE Spark, we are proud to have contributed funding to one of this year's projects, "Diagnosis Without Delay", based in Tallaght University Hospital. This impactful project aims to fund and maintain an ultrasound machine to support faster, more efficient monitoring of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD). Intestinal ultrasound is an effective, non-invasive, and low-cost tool that allows clinicians to assess disease activity quickly and safely. By implementing point of care ultrasound, the team can provide timely, accurate assessments in many cases, helping to cut wait times and reduce treatment delays for patients living with IBD.

## Sparking Innovation Transforming Care in the HSE South West

In Cork University Hospital, participants were encouraged to explore how Spark could support their ideas. The Change and Innovation Hub South West also provided an update on the how the Hub assists frontline clinicians.







# Academic Teaching Sessions

St James's Hospital and Tallaght Hospital

This academic teaching session introduced Spark Connect, Design Thinking and our funding calls. Aiming to Spark innovation! Many thanks to medical teams for turning out in great numbers to meet their fellows and learn more about innovation on the front line.



# Celebrating Frontline Creativity

Mid West Innovation Showcase

Hosted by the Innovation for Health & Social Care Committee Mid-West Region in conjunction with the HSE Spark Innovation Programme, this event highlighted impactful projects led by frontline healthcare professionals and UL design students.

Special guest Loretto Grogan, National CNMIO, spoke on the National Digital Health Roadmap and the role of nursing and midwifery in digital transformation. The event also launched the Mid-West Region Digital Problem Postcard, a new initiative to support staff in identifying and solving challenges through innovation.





# AI in Practice

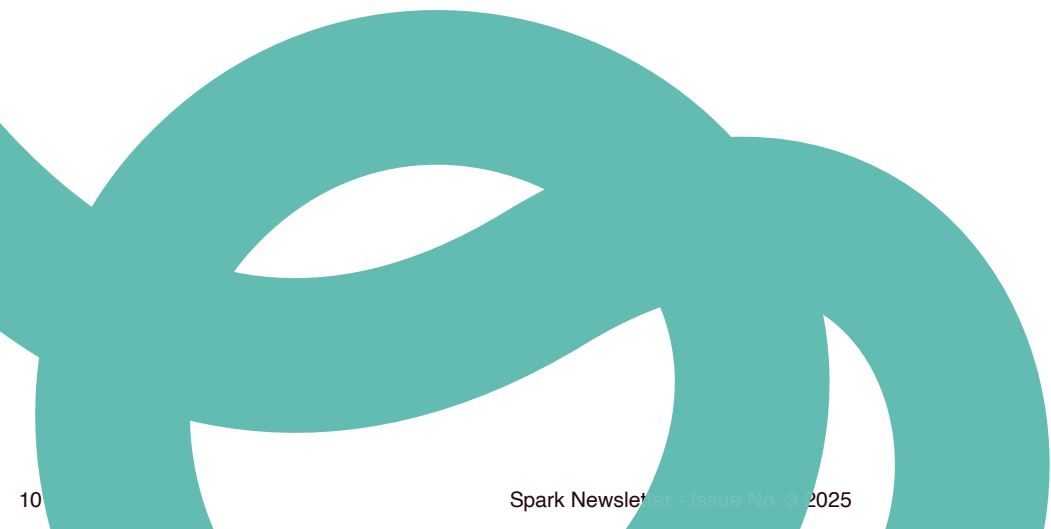
## Transforming Healthcare through Clinician-Led Innovation

In November, the then Minister of State with responsibility for Public Procurement, Digitalisation and eGovernment, Emer Higgins, officially opened the Spark Innovation Programme's networking event, "AI in Practice: Transforming Healthcare through Clinician-Led Innovation." Hosted in Grant Thornton, the event showcased HSE-supported, clinician-led projects at various stages of development, alongside experts in AI and automation.

Guest speakers shared practical insights on how AI can be used safely and effectively to enhance patient care and outcomes, while also reducing the administrative burden on healthcare providers.

Featuring projects ranging from radiology screening and diagnostics to population health analytics, the event highlighted the vibrant AI ecosystem already emerging in Ireland.

The discussions initiated valuable conversations about AI and how it will shape the future of healthcare. Healthcare practitioners had the opportunity to explore both the pitfalls and potential of AI, and there was clear consensus that doctors and healthcare professionals will always remain the experts in their field.







## National Healthcare Awards

We are always delighted to see the hard work of our engaged community recognised both within and beyond the health and social care organisation. This widespread acknowledgement is a testament to the meaningful impact they continue to have on patients and staff across Ireland's health service.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all members of the Spark community who were recently honoured at national award ceremonies. A special mention goes to our own team members, Dr. Michelle Howard, Clinical Design and Innovation Lead and Ann Marie Kiernan, National Nursing/Midwifery Innovation Fellow, who were included among those recognised. Michelle, along with the CH08 Children's Service Project Team, won a HSE Excellence Award and received a Highly Commended distinction at the Irish Healthcare Awards for the CH08 Children's Services Project. Supported by HSE Spark, this project successfully identified and addressed challenges within Children's Services by adopting a Human-Centred Design approach. Engaging 371 service users and staff from Disability, Mental Health, and Primary Care services across CH08 facilitated the co-design of solutions that improved experiences for children, parents, and healthcare professionals. These initiatives collectively aimed to streamline processes, enhance communication, augment collaborative working and improve service delivery within Children's Services.

Ann Marie's project, Relief Reimagined – the use of extended reality for chronic pain, was Highly Commended by the HSE Excellence Awards and shortlisted for an Irish Healthcare Award. This project saw augmented reality (AR) being piloted during ANP-led Qutenza patch treatments to tackle procedural pain and anxiety, major challenges in neuropathic pain management. Integrating gamified AR during the one-hour patch application led to a 48.22% reduction in pain scores, with patients reporting decreased anxiety, enhanced engagement, and greater treatment tolerance.

# Spark Summit

Innovation in Action

Royal  
Convention  
Centre

16  
JUNE 2025

## Save the Date

The HSE Spark Summit is more than an event. It's a gathering of people who care deeply about making healthcare better. It's a space to share ideas, learn from each other, and build solutions that truly make a difference.

Join colleagues, policymakers and innovators from across the system for a day of conversation, creativity, and connection. You'll hear stories that inspire, take part in real discussions, and explore practical ways we can make a difference together.

Mark June 16th in your diary and stay tuned for registration details coming soon.



# Spark Impact 2026

Application deadline for Spark Impact Funding 2026 has been extended to 5pm on Friday 9th Jan

## Driving Innovation in Healthcare

The HSE Spark Innovation Programme is delighted to announce the launch of Spark Impact 2026, our flagship initiative designed to empower frontline healthcare professionals to transform innovative ideas into real-world solutions. This marks the third iteration of this funding call, and we're excited to support projects that can make a meaningful impact

## Funding Available

Funding available ranges from €5,000 to €90,000, enabling you to develop concepts, pilot initiatives and implement change.

## Who Can Apply

Doctors, nurses, midwives, health and social care professionals, and pharmacists – if you have an idea that can improve patient care, staff wellbeing, or system efficiency, we want to hear from you.

**9<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

Application Deadline

**9<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

Pitching Week

The application portal is now live! Access the Applicant Guide, FAQs, and application form. ↓

Don't miss your chance to drive change in Irish healthcare – your idea could be the next big innovation!

[More Resources](#)



# Spark Seed

## Frontline funding

We've just closed our Winter Spark Seed call for applications and we're counting down to the upcoming project pitches on December 18th and 19th. The creativity and passion from healthcare innovators never fail to inspire.

Missed this round? Don't worry, the Spring call for applications is just around the corner. So, start thinking, start innovating, and get ready to turn your ideas into real change with the opportunity of securing up to €5,000 in HSE Spark innovation funding. Whether you're new to innovation or already a seasoned problem-solver, Spark Seed is your platform to turn challenges in your clinical area into real-world solutions.

Your ideas matter and the next opportunity is closer than you think. Keep an eye on our social media pages for upcoming dates for our Spring call for applications for Spark Seed.



# Designer Spotlight



## Dehlia McCarthy

*Service and Interaction Designer*

Dehlia McCarthy is a Service and Interaction Designer with Children's Health Ireland and part of the HSE Spark Innovation Programme Design Team. She holds an Honours MA in Interaction Design from NCAD. She has worked in both the public health and private tech sectors, most notably designing and developing 'Dermadiary', a patient-tracking app for the Mater Hospital's Dermatology Department. In 2024, she received the IDI Graduate Award for Service Design and has been shortlisted for several other design awards.

Dehlia loves meeting patients and clinical staff, listening to their stories and working with them to make everyday experiences in healthcare better. She collaborates with clinical teams across Ireland to understand their services, identify challenges and co-create better ways of working. Her strengths include workshop facilitation, service design and participatory design, and she is especially interested in tackling "wicked" healthcare problems in women's and paediatric health.

Dehlia's Socials





# Design Thinking Workshops

This immersive, full-day online Design Thinking workshop is designed to introduce you to this powerful, human-centred approach to problem-solving and innovation. The workshop is online via Microsoft Teams and facilitated by award-winning designer and design lecturer, Martin Ryan. The workshop focuses on the fundamentals of Design Thinking, guiding you through its process, tools, and mind-set. You'll explore how to understand the needs of key stakeholders through interactive, online activities. This session introduces some of the most effective methods for the crucial first phase of the design process - understanding user needs.

**More workshops for 2026 will be released soon!**

## Paul Hendrick

Service and Interaction Designer

Paul Hendrick is a Service and Interaction Designer with the HSE Spark Innovation Programme and Children's Health Ireland, contributing to the development and rollout of frontline clinical initiatives and national projects through a human-centred design approach. He holds a Master's in Interaction Design from NCAD and a BSc in Product Design from TU Dublin. An award-winning designer, Paul received the Irish James Dyson Award and holds a patented product, reflecting his strong grounding in creative problem-solving.

In recent years, Paul has broadened his practice across service design, physical and digital prototyping, interaction design, and workshop facilitation to help tackle the complex challenges that emerge within healthcare. He is committed to co-design and participatory design, working with patients, families, and staff to ensure solutions are firmly rooted in lived experience. Paul also leads collaborative workshops that bring diverse stakeholders together to shape projects from the outset. He is dedicated to championing design-led innovation and strengthening design capability across the health service.

Paul's Socials





# DESIGN ON THE FRONTLINE



*National Showcase*  
**28<sup>th</sup>**  
*February*

## DOTFL

We are delighted to have launched our national ‘Design On The Frontline’ scholarship in November of this year. This annual initiative offers 12 scholarships to students across five leading Irish Design Schools for the 2025 – 2026 academic year. The programme aims to foster collaboration between designers and the health service to address real clinical challenges within the Irish healthcare system. Each selected student will receive a €1,000 bursary, retain full ownership of their project, and engage with a national innovation network. Their completed work will be showcased at a national event on 28 May 2026.

This initiative reflects Spark’s commitment to supporting innovative thinking that can improve patient experience, staff wellbeing, efficiency, and system-wide outcomes. Students are invited to design solutions that deliver measurable healthcare benefits, ranging from improving patient satisfaction to reducing hospital stays or shifting care closer to home. Projects will be judged by an expert panel spanning design, healthcare and industry. There is also the potential opportunity for successful concepts to be scaled locally or nationally. Applications close on 27 February 2026 and more information can be found on our website. We are excited to see what ‘Design On The Frontline’ brings this year!

Application Form 



# Spark Ignite

Coming soon in early 2026

HSE Spark's Ignite initiative is returning for another year, seeking projects from frontline healthcare workers that have commercial potential. Our mission is to enable HSE staff to validate unmet needs in healthcare, determine if a market exists for their proposed solution, and to support the further development of those ideas. For Ignite 2026 we're excited to broaden our offering, and provide more entrepreneurial guidance with our expert collaborators, to be revealed soon. If you have an idea that you believe solves a problem and could become a successful product or service, keep an eye out for Ignite 2026.







# Consultant Innovation Fund

## Building Momentum and Showcasing Innovation in 2025

The Consultant Innovation Fund, established under the Public Only Consultant Contract 2023, continues to strengthen its role as a catalyst for consultant-led innovation across the Irish health service. Following its first operational year in 2024, activity in 2025 has been marked by deeper engagement, growing collaboration, and an expanding portfolio of projects with real system-level impact. Consultant engagement grew significantly in 2025, with 264 projects approved, alongside a notable increase in pooled and multidisciplinary applications that reflects a growing appetite for team-based innovation. Funding awards rose accordingly, from €4.7 million in 2024 to €6.18 million in 2025, supporting a diverse range of initiatives spanning pathway redesign, digital health and AI, translational research, and workforce development.

A standout moment in 2025 for the Consultant Innovation Fund was AI in Practice event, Organised by the HSE Spark Innovation Programme in November. The event showcased 27 CIF-funded projects, demonstrating how consultants are advancing the use of AI across diagnostics, workflow automation, imaging, simulation training, and patient experience. The event also featured keynote speakers, including Kevin Kelly, National Lead for AI, who highlighted national priorities, emerging opportunities, and the strategic importance of consultant-led innovation in shaping Ireland’s digital health landscape.

Looking ahead to 2026, consultants are strongly encouraged to engage early with the pre-submission process, which closes on 16 January 2026 and provides tailored feedback to strengthen applications ahead of the final submission deadline of 03 April 2026. Applicants are also reminded that all approved CIF funding must be fully spent within the calendar year in which it is awarded, ensuring timely delivery of impact.

As the CIF moves into 2026, strengthened processes and expanded supports are expected to further boost engagement, cementing the fund as a cornerstone of consultant-led innovation nationwide.



# Day in the life of a Spark Innovation Fellow

**Siobhan Power**

**National HSCP Innovation Fellow**

When I was asked to write about a typical day as a National Spark Innovation Fellow, my reaction was, “there is no such thing!” and that is actually, one of the best things about the Fellowship. No two days are the same. I joined the Programme from my role as a Clinical Specialist Dietitian in Tallaght University Hospital, where every day began with a beleaguered battle with the N7 (spoiler: the N7 always wins). In this role there is a hybrid working approach with a lot of flexibility. Now I listen to Morning Ireland in my kitchen instead of the car.

So, what do I actually do? Over the course of a single day, you might find me preparing a webinar, writing a report, troubleshooting technical issues during a live pitching event or talking with a healthcare worker who wants to explore an innovation idea. The Spark Fellowship is capital-B busy but the fast pace suits my impatient personality and the diversity of the role keeps every day interesting. There are always opportunities to learn, grow and experience new challenges.

One year in and I am still learning every day. The opportunity for peer learning is one of my favourite things about the Fellowship. The Spark Team is a bit like a human Swiss Army knife - someone on the team almost always has the expertise or past experience needed to help you navigate a challenge. I have developed a huge range of new skills in my time with the Programme. The expression “steep learning curve” definitely springs to mind here.

Within the team there is an infectious energy and an unwavering commitment to frontline staff who are motivated to drive change for the good of their patients, service users and colleagues. Some of the best moments in Spark are when you see a frontline-led project progress from concept stage to full implementation.

If this job sounds like something you could imagine yourself doing, keep an eye out for Fellowship opportunities in the new year. I never expected to end up here, and it has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career.



*Siobhan Power, National HSCP Innovation Fellow*

**Applications for the HSCP, NCHD, Nursing and Midwifery national Innovation fellowships are now open.**

Closing date for applications 5pm 16th Jan 2026

To find out more visit our website.

[Fellowship Application](#) 






# Stress Test your Innovation Ideas

Frontline healthcare workers are brimming with ideas that could improve care for patients and service users or make life easier for themselves and their colleagues. The challenge is knowing which ideas are worth developing.

To support this early stage of innovation, the Spark Team has created a series of short, practical videos designed to help healthcare workers “stress test” an idea before investing significant time and resources. The stress test examines an innovation idea through three crucial lenses: Desirability, Feasibility and Viability.

Using real-world examples, these videos help staff gain a clearer sense of whether their idea has real-world potential. Desirability asks, “Do people want us to do this?” Feasibility asks, “Can we do this?” Viability asks, “Should we do this?”

The videos aim to help viewers think more objectively about their idea, highlight potential pitfalls, support decision making and help innovators focus their energy where it can have the greatest impact for the health service. The full set takes about fifteen minutes to watch and is available here

[Watch Here](#) 





A PRACTITIONER'S HANDBOOK

# THIS IS SERVICE DESIGN DOING

Applying Service Design Thinking in the real world

Get your copy now




Carla Zampaglione | TEDx

## Read

**This Is Service Design Doing:**  
Applying Service Design Thinking in the Real World 1st Edition

By Authors - Marc Stickdorn, Markus Edgar Hormess, Adam Lawrence, Jakob Schneider

Read Here 

## Listen

**Healthy by Design** - Home on the Pharm (Scott Osiecki)

Creating a better pharmacy experience by delivering the prescriptions straight to your mailbox.

Listen Here 

## Watch

**The secret to designing better medical devices** | Carla Zampaglione | TEDx

Watch Here 



# Get in Touch

Join the innovation conversation  
by connecting with us on:



@programmeSpark



Spark\_Programme



[linkedin.com/company/hse-spark-  
innovation-programme](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hse-spark-innovation-programme)



[spark@hse.ie](mailto:spark@hse.ie)



[www.hse.ie/spark](http://www.hse.ie/spark)



[@hse-spark.sky.social](https://www.skyline.ie/social/@hse-spark)