



**Reflections and
learnings from
Medtronic Healthy
Communities Fund**

1. Background

On September 19th, 2019 an event was held in the Morrison Hotel to celebrate the successful implementation of a dynamic, innovative and strategic partnership between non-government organisations (NGO's) and philanthropic organisations. Up to 90 key health stakeholders from government, industry and the community attended.

Over a four year period, the Medtronic Foundation invested €1 million to fund health-focused charities to expand access to quality chronic disease care among underserved Irish communities. Specifically, the Medtronic Healthy Communities Fund (Fund) targeted non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which account for 91% of all deaths in Ireland. NCDs are diseases that are not passed on from person to person with four main types accounting for 70% of those deaths: cardiovascular diseases (29%), cancers (30%), chronic respiratory disease (9%) and diabetes (2%)¹.

The partnership between the Medtronic Foundation and The Irish Cancer Society, The Irish Heart Foundation, Marie Keating and Siel Bleu (Partners), facilitated by the Community Foundation for Ireland, directly impacted on the lives of 12,600 people. Through the process 146 trainers were upskilled and 134 local partner organisations benefited from the programme. This investment demonstrated value for money as the impacts made through the Fund works out at €78 per person.

With the support of the Fund, the Partners produced a resource (Building Healthy Communities: Strategic Partnership from Concept to Delivery - download a copy here www.communityfoundation.ie) as a roadmap for other NGO's and funders, to fill the gaps in service access and provision. It is also a step-by-step guide for community-based organisations to use philanthropic funding to build better health outcomes across Ireland.

2. The Event

The event was moderated by Shane Coleman who set the context, introduced the speakers and encouraged those present to engage. The schedule included; presentations from the Medtronic Foundation, the Community Foundation for Ireland and Healthy Ireland; a panel discussion with key stakeholders; and a Masterclass hosted by the Partners with support from one of their implementing partners and a beneficiary of one of the programmes.

3. Setting the scene

Collectively, Tina Roche (CEO, The Community Foundation for Ireland), Jackie Fielding (Vice President, Medtronic UK and Ireland), Kate O'Flaherty, (Director, Health and Wellbeing Programme, Healthy Ireland), Paurvi Bhatt (President, Medtronic Foundation) set the scene for; philanthropy in Ireland, Medtronic's commitment and approach to working in underserved communities, and the Irish policy context for NCDs. Through their presentations a number of key messages emerged:

- The impressive outcomes from this Fund demonstrates to Government, and other private funders, the value and impact created through multi-

¹ More information on; the Fund, the Medtronic Foundation, the Community Foundation, the national partners, the policy context, the partners, and the programmes can be accessed through the <https://www.communityfoundation.ie/insights/news/blueprint-for-healthier-ireland-launched-by-the-medtronic-foundation-and-th>

year funding, which is in contrast to once off or single year ad hoc funding.

- Key to the Fund's success is strategic partnership and flexibility that facilitates the unearthing of unforeseen outcomes such as the Building Healthy Communities resource.
- Prevention work that is innovative, evidenced-based and led through a partnership approach (at national, regional and local level) is a valuable tool to successfully respond to gaps in service access and provision.
- Philanthropic organisations are keen to increase their impact by engaging strategically with government partners and other key stakeholders.
- Philanthropy in Ireland has the potential to grow, making it essential to create an enabling environment for philanthropy across the country. By building links within a cross-section of industries we can encourage more support through corporate donations, where currently only 7% of funding comes from.
- The government sees the value in and is committed to working in partnership with a range of stakeholders as they are aware that this is necessary to successfully reduce the negative impacts of NCDs on individuals and communities.
- One of the government's key roles is to create opportunities for partners to work strategically together and use its influence to convene mechanisms for partnerships to thrive.
- Everyone is effected by NCDs either directly or through a member of their family and/or friends group.
- We have a long way to go to comprehensively address NCDs requiring us to build the capacity of the whole community to respond collectively i.e. strategic partnership and volunteerism drives impact.

4. Panel discussion – Growing Philanthropy to support healthy communities

The next phase of the event focused on how to grow philanthropy to support healthy communities. Representatives from the Medtronic Foundation (Paurvi Bhatt), Community Foundation for Ireland (Tina Roche), Healthy Ireland (Kate O'Flaherty), Philanthropy Ireland (Éilis Murray), Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (Bairbre Nic Aongusa) and Social Innovation Fund (Deidre Mortell) formed a panel to discuss emerging issues.

A series of questions were put to the panel by the moderator and the audience; below is high level view of their responses.

Q. How do we grow philanthropy to support healthy communities that are sustainable?

Responses:

- Build stronger links between philanthropy and government to provide support to the community and voluntary sector as there is a growing need to develop a sustainable environment for NGO's to thrive. Supporting social enterprise and ways to empower communities should be at the forefront of our national policy on community development.
- There needs to be a national policy on philanthropy to support giving that is evidence based and has agreed procedures in place. Government needs to create a space for industry partners to provide support, which aligns with current policy, through a pooling of funding mechanism.
- Continue to build on the Social Innovation model of funding where the government provides matched funding to the philanthropic sources.
- No one approach will work, requiring a range of strategies and approaches that supports philanthropy to be a catalyst for change; this Fund is a perfect example. It is also important to promote philanthropy so that stakeholders across multiple industries are informed of how they can have a similar impact.
- There are a number of examples (locally and internationally) of how philanthropy has taken the lead in supporting organisations to innovate solutions which demonstrate their success and value for money i.e. proof of concept. However, it is therefore imperative to formalise a public-private partnership to support long-term investment in these solutions, otherwise it becomes very difficult to sustain and grow the initiatives. Formalisation can occur through a memorandum of understanding agreed between public and private bodies to scale projects once there is proof of concept.

Q. Most of people present and on panel are women – is there a strategy to respond to this?

Response:

- Although the majority of people involved in healthcare are women, the majority of leadership positions are often held by men, so actually it is unusual to have so many of the panel in leadership roles who are women.
It is important to continue to build on mechanisms that encourage women to take on more leadership roles.

Q. Why do people with NCDs find it so difficult to get funding?

Response:

- The funding structures established by government and, by some of the private donors, are often complicated, part of consensus process leads to complicated structures being developed.

Q. Why is it so challenging to translate evidence into practice i.e. proof of concept has been achieved but yet sustainable investment is difficult to get (funding is short-term but NCDs are long-term and often intergenerational)?

Response:

- There is a finite amount of resources which makes it difficult to get sustainable funding, so persistence is needed albeit frustrating for the project promoters. It is important to build on success by continuing to collaborate with other organisations. We are operating in a political system that is often competing with the needs of our communities making it vital that we advocate to our local and national politicians - power and change comes from the citizenry.

Q. How can philanthropy best address a change to a more inclusive and equitable environment?

Response:

- Build on a social justice model along with providing multiannual funding – finding a way to do that is essential. Philanthropy can provide multiannual e.g. marriage equality through Atlantic Philanthropy. Invest in partnership collaboration which also needs to be sustainable.

5. Masterclass

The masterclass was the final part of the event, which gave an overview of how the four Partners worked within a strategic partnership framework to develop and test their programmes. It was an opportunity for Partners to present Building Healthy Communities: Strategic Partnerships from Concept to Delivery, highlighting the model along with its critical elements.

The Fund's flexibility allowed the Partners to collaborate together in the final year to explore key learnings resulting in the unearthing of: a **Partnership Framework**, which illustrates a case for creating added value through philanthropic and NGO partnership and a **Concept to Delivery** model for developing, delivering and testing health promotion interventions or programmes for community and education settings².

² More details available [Building Healthy Communities: Strategic Partnership from Concept to Delivery](#) (p.19 and p.21)

During the presentation, two key partners were introduced namely; Early Childhood Ireland as they rolled out the Irish Heart Foundation's, Kids Active programme nationally and a beneficiary of Siel Bleu's, Exercise, COPD and Me programme, both of whom shared their experience of being involved with the Partners and the impact it had on them or their organisation³.

The purpose of the masterclass was to generate discussions on how the Partners key learnings can make an impact across the Healthy Ireland Framework (at national, regional and local level). Importantly, the class highlighted the need to continue to build on the strategic partnerships developed and to come up suitable funding models.

To conclude the masterclass, the Partners divided the participants into six groups and asked them to answer the following questions:

1. What is your initial reaction to the presentation?
2. What are your comments on the themes and approaches highlighted by the partners in the Concept to Delivery working model?
3. How can the key learnings from this collaborative process have wider applicability within the strategic implementation of Healthy Ireland at national, regional, and local level?
4. What else should happen to further develop and resource the scale up of the demonstration projects and future initiatives?

Each table was invited to share their key responses with the larger group:

Table 1: It is very helpful to consider potential outcomes at the start of a programme/project. It is recognised that this work is not always straightforward, taking a risk is okay and unexpected needs may emerge along the process.

The power of telling emotional stories that make health issues more real and tangible-was well demonstrated in the masterclass.

Bringing together organisations with a common vision requires a lot of commitment and the process requires resourcing beyond funding alone.

The challenges facing rural groups were particularly noted. Corporate and charity organisations can learn from each other; and this strategic approach is attractive to corporate funders. The potential for greater collaboration between them, while highlighting the critical role played by Healthy Ireland as the umbrella for these actions was highlighted.

We are conditioned to believe that we are in a world of scarcity instead of growth, so we should look to partnerships to see how we demonstrate the impact of collaboration on individuals and communities.

Table 2:

It was brave of the four national partners to work together as they are organisations that share funding. When collaborating, maximise the strengths that each partner has to offer. Beneficiary buy-in and early engagement is critical. Stakeholder engagement happens even before developing funding proposals. This type of work takes time and cannot be rushed – this, in turn raises the importance of having multi-annual funding to support the work. Funders should be approachable and programmes/projects should not have to fit funding models, but instead should be replicable across groups or areas.

³ More information on the impact can be found on <https://www.communityfoundation.ie/insights/news/blueprint-for-healthier-ireland-launched-by-the-medtronic-foundation-and-th> (p.14 and p.16)

Table 3: We are responding/firefighting instead of investing and working on prevention – we need to invest in the process.

Table 4: The projects demonstrated were ambitious and successful.

Reflection is a very valuable part of the process of partnership working and developing programmes and much learning can be gained from it. The value of journaling throughout the process and not just the final outcomes was noted. More emphasis and value should be placed on evaluation, especially Social Returns On Investment (SROI) evaluations and it was suggested that Healthy Ireland could consider resourcing the evaluation of disease preventions interventions. The challenge of scaling up and the need for a dissemination and communications strategy were also highlighted.

Table 5: There should be more opportunities to get together and share learning and expertise. The group noted with regard to health inequalities how relatively small funding can go a long way. However, evaluation is important and can be used to secure ongoing funding and therefore sustainability. Collaboration is also key as organisations share similar goals. A strategic partner is necessary to drive the programme. For the Train the trainer approach, pathways for delivery of programmes should be clear. Advertising of programmes and producing literature and guidance for people was also discussed.

Table 6: Hearing from the beneficiaries was very impactful and demonstrated how the benefits of programmes go beyond the individual into families and communities. The value of partnership and collaboration is evident along with the need for multi annual funding that is strategic. The group noted that funders including corporates, can also bring expertise and non-financial resources to the table. There is a need to mainstream and resource this work. Healthy Ireland is the obvious enabler to link in with regional networks such as Healthy Counties/Cities, including Sports Ireland or other sporting bodies. Organisations can work together rather than compete with each other.

6. Conclusion

It was evident from the stakeholders responses during the event and the masterclass that the Medtronic Foundation, in collaboration with the Partners and the Community Foundation for Ireland, have come up with a successful model of funding national organisations to extend their impact to local communities that are traditionally underserved. Using a multi annual approach to funding that is flexible and strategic results in impressive outcomes for people living with NCDs and those who are potentially at risk. Over the four years, the Fund responded to national policy and engaged with policy makers. It also resulted in the production of an evidence based, high quality resource that can be used by other NGOs to implement their programmes and it is a successful funding model for other funders, public and private, to use.

7. Recommendations

Based on the feedback from the presentations, the panel discussion and the masterclass, five overarching recommendations emerged:

- 1.** Health promotion/ disease prevention interventions/programmes should be funded on a multi-annual basis to allow for strategic planning and implementation.
- 2.** There should be a formalised public private partnership in disease prevention/ health promotion work to support sustainability and scalability once there is proof of concept. There is also a need for a national policy on philanthropy and this is currently being drafted.
- 3.** Collaboration between key stakeholders at national, regional and local levels should be standard practice and needs to be resourced. Prevention work should be innovative, evidenced-based and led through a partnership approach.
- 4.** National policy along with programmes should be aligned and responsive to emerging needs with Healthy Ireland having a pivotal role in this regard in bringing innovative and tested programmes at national level to support developments at regional level
- 5.** Healthy Ireland should place more emphasis on the resourcing of systematic evaluation of, especially Social Returns On Investment (SROI) evaluations, to build the evidence base of successful Health promotion interventions in Ireland.