



11 APR 2024

Ms Morag McDowell
Health and Disability Commissioner

Tēnā koe Morag

Timely access to quality health care

As Minister of Health and your shareholding minister this letter sets out my expectations for the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC) for the remainder of 2023/24 and for 2024/25.

I want to thank you for your commitment over the past year to delivering your agreed objectives during a period of significant change in the health system. The work carried out by HDC plays a crucial role in achieving our collective goals for a healthier and more resilient society.

Financial management expectations

We are operating in a difficult fiscal and economic environment locally and internationally and we expect these conditions to be present in the longer term. We are committed to ensuring that the wider public service and the health system work well for New Zealanders.

Your continued focus on delivering your statutory objectives will be crucial, and this needs to be undertaken in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner. As health resources will continue to be finite, it will be important to identify and pursue any opportunities to work collaboratively and collectively with other entities where this will result in health gains or enable efficiencies.

My priorities

The health system is in crisis, despite the ongoing commitment from frontline clinicians. Across various metrics, including access and timeliness, the system is performing poorly and has deteriorated over recent years. My overarching vision for health is ensuring timely access to quality health care. I want to achieve good outcomes for all New Zealanders, with a focus on those with highest need as a key criterion.

The Government Policy Statement on Health is the primary direction setting vehicle for our system and will set out more detail for my priorities for the next three years. The health system will focus on improvement in three priority areas related to health services which are

access, timeliness and quality. The health system will also focus on three priority areas to make improvements to critical enablers; workforce, targets and infrastructure.

Health targets

The Government is reinstating health targets, and you will be aware that we have recently announced five health targets for the system that will be in place from 1 July 2024. The aim of the health targets is to lift performance across priority areas, provide a focus for effort and resource and to support all parts of the system to move together to achieve our health system goals. The Minister for Mental Health is also setting five targets for mental health and addiction which will be communicated shortly. The annual performance expectations and milestones against the targets will be set in the Government Policy Statement on Health for 2024-2027.

Governance

Strong governance of your entity will be essential in leading your agency in this environment. I ask that you continue to ensure that your executive staff are providing the right information to enable the Board to make the right strategic decisions, and to undertake assessment and learning activities to improve the performance of your Board members in their important role.

Accountability

I expect that your reporting, and the associated monitoring undertaken by the Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora (the Ministry), will enable me to assess both the performance of your entity and how you are contributing to overall system performance.

Health and Disability Commissioner

I ask you think about how HDC can add value to wider system performance and to work collaboratively and collectively with other entities as appropriate. I encourage you to prioritise your efforts and resources on areas where you can add the most value to our collective understanding of the public health system.

While the Ministry and health Crown entities can monitor system and service inputs, outputs and expenditure, HDC is uniquely placed to observe emerging risk. I encourage you to collaborate with Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) in identifying and addressing areas of systemic concern and report findings to the Ministry.

I understand HDC is receiving record volumes of complaints and that the number of open complaints is increasing. I ask that HDC prioritise its resources and focus on resolving this backlog of complaints. I also ask that you work with the Ministry, Health New Zealand and other relevant entities to understand the wider pathway for complaints and work together to consider how these can be addressed earlier and reduce pressures on HDC.

The HDC is in a unique position to influence system change and improve quality to health services. I would like HDC to report regularly to the Ministry on how you are making tangible impacts on the health system.

Please continue to review HDC's Act and Code and engagement with the Ministry and stakeholders where appropriate. I look forward to considering the review recommendations in December this year.

I ask you to provide a draft of your Statement of Performance Expectations for 2024/25 to your contact at the Ministry by 30 April 2024. I also ask that you update your current Statement of Intent to demonstrate how your current priorities align with the new priorities

of this Government. I ask you to liaise with the Ministry regarding an agreed timeframe for when an updated Statement of Intent can be provided.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shane Reti', written in a cursive style.

Hon Dr Shane Reti

Minister of Health

cc Dr Diana Sarfati, Director-General of Health