

Briefing

Developing a footcare assistant workforce

Date due to MO:	25 July 2024	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	H2024046092
To:	Hon Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Contact for telephone discussion

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Minister's office to complete:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn | |

Comment:

Developing a footcare assistant workforce

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE

Date: 25 July 2024

To: Hon Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Health

Purpose of report

1. This briefing provides you with requested advice on progress towards developing and embedding the footcare assistant role to support podiatric services. Along with a summary of work completed to date, this briefing also provides you with an overview of next steps in establishing this role.

Summary

2. The footcare assistant workforce provides a potential opportunity to increase access to foot health services across New Zealand. A defined training pathway for footcare assistants can also increase the potential pipeline of graduates entering the podiatry profession, which is currently very small and growing at a slow rate.
3. Work is currently underway across health and education sectors to support the development of the footcare assistant workforce. This includes guidance from the podiatry profession on integrating footcare assistants into practice, developing a defined training pathway, and establishing a consistent footcare assistant role within Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora.
4. The podiatry workforce plays a critical role in managing diabetes-related foot conditions. Establishing a footcare assistant workforce will support the provision of podiatric care within renal services across Health NZ. Diabetes is one of the five non-communicable diseases that the government is focused on accelerating action to address. Improved prevention of these non-communicable diseases will be achieved through the five enablers:
 - a. Access
 - b. Prevention
 - c. Workforce
 - d. Quality
 - e. Infrastructure.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| a) note the progress which has been made to date in developing the footcare assistant workforce, along with the other considerations outlined in this briefing. | Yes/No |
| b) agree that Health New Zealand lead the planning for implementing the footcare assistant workforce and keep you updated on progress toward this aim via the National Diabetes Action Plan. | Yes/No |
| c) agree that Health New Zealand will provide an update on progress toward developing the footcare assistant workforce in 6 months' time. | Yes/No |



Dr Diana Sarfati
Director-General of Health
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Date: 23 July 2024

Hon Dr Shane Reti
Minister of Health

Date:

Developing a footcare assistant workforce

Background

5. There are currently 471 registered podiatrists in New Zealand, with only 9% currently employed directly by Health New Zealand. As our ageing population grows, alongside increasing rates of diabetes, demand for podiatric services is increasing.
6. Footcare assistants provide a potential workforce to support and increase access to podiatric services across New Zealand. Establishing training pathways for this workforce can also increase the potential pipeline of graduates entering the profession and enable students to earn while they learn.
7. Footcare assistants work under the supervision of a registered podiatrist and carry out delegated tasks such as undertaking foot health checks, cutting and filing toenails, providing dermatology and foot health advice, and providing basic wound management.
8. Following your meeting on 5 June 2024 with podiatrists and members of the Podiatrists Board of New Zealand you requested advice on the development of the footcare assistant workforce including training pathways and key deliverables.

Progress to date in developing the footcare assistant workforce

Health New Zealand progress

9. The establishment of the footcare assistant workforce is supported in the upcoming Health Workforce Plan 2024-2027. Establishing this workforce is also integrated into the National Diabetes Action Plan (NDAP).
10. Health New Zealand's Health Workforce team has been working with Auckland University of Technology (AUT) to develop a training programme for footcare assistants through a partnership design approach. AUT is developing a proposal for this training programme and will submit this to the Health Workforce team by 26 July.
11. Health New Zealand health has taken a focused approach to establishing footcare assistant and podiatry training pathways, emphasising the following:
 - a. The provision of a supported entry to the workforce (with earn as you learn opportunities) that staircases into further study (such as Undergraduate Bachelor of Health Science - Podiatry).
 - b. Establishing additional entry pathways to the podiatry profession, including the possibility of a graduate entry pathway from other health professions.
 - c. Ensuring graduate entry programmes are flexible (e.g., they can be done part time).
 - d. Designing future learning programmes around long-term conditions (diabetes, arthritis, rheumatology etc).

Education provider progress

12. As outlined above, AUT is currently finalising proposed training options for footcare assistants and podiatry and will be sharing this with Health New Zealand health

workforce by 26 July. The proposed training programme is likely to offer a 30-point course which will provide a level 5 certificate of proficiency on completion. This design will also provide an option for recognition of prior learning for those who wish to pursue a podiatry qualification. AUT is hopeful that they could begin offering training in Semester 1 of 2025.

Regulation and support from the Podiatry profession

13. Currently the assistant workforce within health is largely unregulated. This is in keeping with a risk-proportionate approach to regulation of the health workforce given that assistants work under the supervision of registered health professionals. They carry out an agreed range of delegated tasks which they have been appropriately trained to undertake. Therefore, there is not a need to regulate the footcare assistant workforce in keeping with current health workforce regulatory practice in New Zealand.
14. Both the Podiatrists Board of New Zealand and Podiatry New Zealand have provided guidance to podiatrists to support the integration of footcare assistants into their practice. Guidance from the Podiatrists Board outlines considerations for podiatry practitioners when delegating tasks to a foot care assistant for patient or client care or treatment. These considerations emphasise the importance of quality and safety of care and service. Guidance from Podiatry New Zealand is aligned to the Podiatrist Board guidance regarding podiatrist responsibility for delegated tasks and includes an example of a position description for footcare assistants.

Impact on high needs populations

15. Entry requirements for footcare assistant training will be accessible to a wider range of potential students and can support the growth and diversity of the podiatry profession by offering experience and additional pathways into the profession.
16. Improving access to podiatry services by developing a footcare assistant workforce can improve foot health outcomes for New Zealanders and particularly for people with diabetes. Given that Māori and Pacific people experience higher rates of diabetes than the general population, the development of this workforce can also help to improve equitable health outcomes.

Considerations in developing the footcare assistant workforce

Accessibility, funding, and regulation

17. Accessible training will be critical to developing and expanding the footcare assistant workforce. Given that a single training provider is currently proposed, programme design and delivery should enable access to students throughout New Zealand, not just in the Auckland region.
18. Uncertainty regarding funding for both training programmes and the establishment of footcare assistant roles within Health New Zealand act as a current barrier to implementation.
19. While current health workforce regulatory settings do not set a precedent for the regulation of the assistant health workforce, it is noted that these regulatory settings are likely to change in the future. It will be important to maintain a right touch approach to

regulation of this health workforce in order to support the provision of safe and accessible foot health services in New Zealand.

Next steps

20. We propose that Health New Zealand lead the process of planning for and developing the footcare assistant workforce and keep you updated on progress toward this aim via progress reports against the NDAP.
21. Health New Zealand will continue to work with AUT to establish a training programme for footcare assistants, with an aim of delivering this programme by Semester 1 of 2025.
22. The Ministry will continue to monitor overall training development and implementation of these roles to improve access to foot care expertise.

ENDS.

Minister's Notes

PROACTIVELY RELEASED