

Hon Simeon Brown

Minister of Health
Minister for State Owned Enterprises
Minister for Auckland



16 April 2025

Ms Morag McDowell
Health and Disability Commissioner

By email to: s 9(2)(a)

Dear Morag,

As you are aware, this Government is committed to improving health outcomes by providing New Zealanders with timely access to high-quality services, delivered by a financially sustainable health system.

I recently announced my priorities and a *Health Delivery Plan* to make immediate improvements to the delivery of health services to New Zealanders.

My key areas of focus are:

- getting Health New Zealand (Health NZ) back to basics;
- driving shorter stays in emergency departments;
- getting on top of the elective surgery backlog;
- enabling faster access to primary care;
- setting out a long-term health infrastructure programme; and
- streamlining accountability mechanisms, statutory and regulatory settings to drive performance.

I know that you and the Health and Disability Commission (HDC) will support me in ensuring that these areas of focus are strongly positioned in HDC's work programme.

My overarching expectation is that we are relentless in our pursuit of the delivery of more and better health services for New Zealanders. In doing so, I expect HDC to put patient need at the heart of every decision it makes and to prioritise care based on clinical need, not race.

HDC is uniquely placed to observe any changes to the quality of patient care in Health NZ's delivery of services and those in primary care. I expect therefore that you will:

- **Focus on the basics:** I expect the HDC will work with Health NZ, primary care organisations, and health entities to ensure there is an active programme of identifying and responding to any systemic concerns across the health system. This should include sharing information on trends in complaints and insights with the Ministry of Health to support their monitoring role. Of particular importance will be flagging any issues arising from Health NZ's move to accelerate waiting times and address waitlists.
- **Address the complaints backlog:** I understand HDC is working its way through a significant number of complaints associated with Health NZ. I recognise that there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints in recent years, and that the HDC closes around two-thirds of cases within two months. However, any backlog in complaints needs to

be cleared. I ask HDC to prioritise its resources to resolve these outstanding complaints expeditiously.

- **Speed up complaints resolution:** I am concerned New Zealanders' trust and confidence in the delivery of health services is declining, and I want to arrest that decline. Unresolved or delayed complaints and a lack of clarity around which complaints are prioritised further exacerbates issues of public confidence. I expect you to work with Health NZ, the Ministry of Health and other health entities to streamline the process and pathway for complaints so they are addressed earlier.
- **Fiscal responsibility:** Your continued focus on delivering on your statutory obligations and objectives in an effective, efficient and fiscally responsible manner will be critical in an environment where health resources are finite, and taxpayers and consumers of health services have high expectations of performance.

HDC has an important role in influencing the quality of care. I would like to receive regular reports on the impact of HDC's work to improve quality across the health system. I encourage you to work with the Ministry of Health on your reporting of progress.

I look forward to your response to this request and to continuing our collaborative efforts to improve health outcomes for all New Zealanders.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Health

Copy to: Audrey Sonerson, Director-General, Ministry of Health.