Aide-Mémoire

Meeting with Pharmacy Investments Group | Chemist Warehouse

Date due to MO:	2 December 2025	**Date of meeting:**	4 December 2025
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	**Reference:**	H2025075340
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand: ☒		
Proactive release:	This **title** is proposed by the Ministry of Health for proactive release: ☒		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
John McGrath	Director, Priority Projects Strategy and Policy	s 9(2)(a)
Tim Vines	Manager, Therapeutics Strategy and Policy	

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About the meeting

Purpose of meeting:	To discuss Pharmacy Investments Group's growth plan, and service improvements and innovation in the pharmacy sector.
Details of meeting:	**Date:** 4 December 2025 **Time:** 2.50-3.10pm **Venue:** Auckland Policy Office
Attendees	Ravniel Singh, Director, Pharmacy Investments Group and Chemist Warehouse
Organisation	Pharmacy Investments Group is associated with the Chemist Warehouse pharmacy chain, which will shortly open its 70th New Zealand pharmacy.
Ministry representatives	Tim Vines, Manager Therapeutics Policy (via Teams)
Other information	Pharmacy Investments Group has provided a briefing paper to support discussions at the meeting (Appendix 2).

s 9(2)(g)(i)

[redacted]

Background and context

1. Pharmacy Investments Group (PI Group) has requested a meeting to discuss the role they can play in the healthcare system. PI Group is associated with the Chemist Warehouse pharmacy chain.

The Integrated Community Pharmacy Services Agreements

2. The Integrated Community Pharmacy Services Agreements (Agreements) are the contracts between Health New Zealand (Health NZ) and individual community pharmacies. Without an Agreement, a community pharmacy cannot dispense funded prescriptions. PI Group say that they have experienced regional variance, delays and uncertainty in obtaining Agreements for their stores.

3. In considering an application for an Agreement, Health NZ must take into account the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022, their own commissioning and pharmacy contracting policies, government health policy, and the Commerce Act's competition provisions. Health NZ advise that "decisions are often finely balanced and can be subject to debate".

4. s 9(2)(g)(i) [redacted]

Modernising medicines regulation

5. Cabinet agreed in 2024 to modernise regulation of medicines by repealing the Medicines Act 1981 and replacing it with a Medical Products Bill [SOU-24-MIN-0115]. This Bill is being led by Hon Casey Costello, Associate Minister of Health, and expected to be introduced to the House around mid-2026. The Medical Products Bill is intended to enable innovative health services while protecting patient safety.

6. PI Group supports the Medical Products Bill and its aims. They wish to ensure it will enable innovative models such as centralised 'hub and spoke' dispensing, in which a central hub packs medicines for multiple pharmacies. Currently this is legally possible within a company, but not between companies.

7. PI Group Director Ravniel Singh has previously met with Ministry officials and Minister Costello to discuss the Medical Products Bill, including enabling hub and spoke models. There are professional and patient-safety considerations in enabling hub and spoke models where different companies carry out different activities. However, the Medical Products Bill will create a framework to allow this to happen following engagement with industry, practitioners and other stakeholders.

Pharmacist workforce

8. New Zealand currently has a shortage of pharmacists. PI Group says this should be addressed by facilitating immigration of overseas-trained pharmacists.

9. Pharmacists are already on the Immigration New Zealand Green List's Straight to Residence Pathway. In order to practice in New Zealand, overseas-trained pharmacists must have their training and qualifications recognised by the New Zealand Pharmacy Council and meet requirements including relevant clinical experience and English

language proficiency. Pharmacists whose qualifications are not recognised may have to undertake additional training before being able to apply for registration as a pharmacist.

10. Cabinet has agreed to amend the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003, which you announced in September, to make regulators more responsive to the needs of the health system. A key objective of these changes is faster recognition of overseas-trained practitioners.

Over-the-counter medicines

11. PI Group says that more could be done to improve access to over-the-counter medicines (pharmacy and restricted medicines). While it is unclear what specific changes they would like, we understand they have engaged with the Ministry of Regulation's review of over-the-counter medicines labelling provisions. This review is considering changes that would further harmonise labelling requirements for over-the-counter medicines sold in New Zealand and, in particular, those imported from Australia. The Government has not yet taken any decisions on the Ministry of Regulation's labelling review.

12. Longer term, other changes could speed up access to over-the-counter medicines. For example, Associate Minister of Health, Hon David Seymour, has proposed using the Medical Products Bill to enable any medicine approved for over-the-counter sale in Australia to be sold in New Zealand without a Medsafe approval. This proposal has not yet been considered by Cabinet.

13. Finally, it is open to PI Group to apply to the Medicines Classification Committee to have any prescription medicine reclassified as a restricted (pharmacist) or pharmacy-only medicine.

Pharmacy ownership deregulation

14. In August 2025, Cabinet agreed not to carry over restrictions on community pharmacy ownership from the Medicines Act into the Medical Products Bill [SOU-25-MIN-0101]. One of the restrictions, preventing prescribers from holding an interest in community pharmacies, has since been removed by the Medicines Amendment Act 2025.

15. Chemist Warehouse pharmacies have very complex ownership structures. Mr Singh and other pharmacists hold a majority stakes in each pharmacy, with minority stakes held directly and indirectly by various New Zealand and Australian companies.

John McGrath
Director, Priority Projects
Strategy and Policy

s 9(2)(g)(i)

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[redacted]

Appendix 2: Pharmacy Investments Group briefing paper

Briefing: Pharmacy Investments Group

Purpose

This briefing paper has been prepared for the Hon Casey Costello, Associate Minister of Health, and provides relevant background information ahead of the Minister's meeting with Pharmacy Investments Group (the PI Group) scheduled for 15 October. While this briefing provides a broad overview of the PI Group, the specific focus of the meeting is to discuss opportunities presented by the forthcoming Medical Products Bill, and in particular the benefits of exploring medicine dispensing across the pharmacy industry through the hub and spoke model.

Our role in New Zealand's healthcare system

- Operating 63 Chemist Warehouse Stores from Whāngarei to Dunedin, improving nationwide healthcare affordability and access for all.
- Driving service improvements and innovation through $1.2M investment to date in R&D in areas such as automative robotics for medicine dispensing and telehealth services.
- Our scale, nationwide reach, sector expertise and networks make us a central enabler of scaling up integrated healthcare solutions across our cities and regions.
- Over eight years the PI Group has saved New Zealand $63M in healthcare fees through its $5 prescription discount scheme.
- The PI Group has committed over $3M to community and sector services, funding and sponsorship initiatives. These include operating the House of Wellness Van in South Auckland and regional communities and partnering with the Mental Health Foundation to raise funds for mental health advocacy across New Zealand. Chemist Warehouse is also a Commercial Partner of New Zealand Cricket, Basketball, Netball, Football and Super Rugby, with a dedication to grassroots and development programmes for all to support local communities and promote a healthy, active lifestyle.

Contribution to economic growth and productivity

- Direct employment of 2,800 FTEs and growing, s 9(2)(b)(ii) [redacted]
- Among the fourth largest retail businesses in New Zealand s 9(2)(b)(ii) [redacted]
- Growth and expansion plans progressing to reach 70 stores by calendar year end. Plans for further growth to 140+ stores in the next 5-10 years.
- Supporting the growth strategies of New Zealand suppliers, including United Arab Emirates export market access opportunities via Chemist Warehouse Dubai.

Ownership structure

The first New Zealand Chemist Warehouse pharmacy was opened in 2017. Stores are locally owned by pharmacists through a partnership group ownership model, which means profits are returning to the local community.

The PI Group is partly owned by ASX listed Chemist Warehouse Group headquartered in Melbourne, Australia.

Current policy and regulatory priorities

1. Integrated Community Pharmacy Services Agreements (ICPSAs)

A pharmacy requires an ICPSA with Health NZ to dispense prescriptions. The PI Group applies to the relevant regional Health NZ team for an ICPSA for each new store.

There is a concerning level of regional variance in processing times and decision-making. We have experienced efficient and clear decision-making in certain regions, yet in other regions the application process has been protracted and decision-making unclear, causing significant and costly delays to establishing a new store.

The PI Group advocates for consistency in how the application process is administered from region to region, to provide regulatory stability and certainty.

2. Opportunities in modernising the regulation of medicines

The PI Group supports and sees great opportunity in the Government's intent to modernise the regulation of medicines and medical devices.

We have, for instance, capacity to invest in large scale centralised automative robotics for medicine dispensing across the pharmacy industry through the hub and spoke model. This opportunity cannot be realised under the current legislative framework.

The PI Group also has the supply chain in place to deliver a wide range of prescription medicines, regardless of the level of demand within New Zealand's population. However, the current cost and time associated with registering a new medicine is limiting the range of what Kiwis can access.

3. Pharmacist availability

A strong pharmacist workforce in New Zealand is necessary to avoid nationwide shortages and workforce challenges. The PI Group supports New Zealand actively encouraging skilled pharmacists from overseas by including pharmacists on the Immigration New Zealand Green List.

The PI Group would also support improvements to the registration process to bring it in line with the more streamlined process in Australia – this would help to attract skilled pharmacists to work in New Zealand who may otherwise have chosen Australia on process grounds.

4. Over-the-counter medicine access

The PI Group supports the pharmacy-first message to relieve unnecessary pressure on general practices and emergency departments. We are open to doing more to assist with the promotion of this important message.

Over-the-counter medicine access is obviously a key part of this strategy, and we agree more could be done to expand access to non-prescription treatments, bringing New Zealand more in line with Australia.

The PI Group's nationwide reach

We operate 63 Chemist Warehouse Stores from Whāngarei to Dunedin.

Contact details for our team

Ravniel Singh	Rizman Haroon
Pharmacist | Director	Pharmacist | Director

s 9(2)(a)