

Aide-Mémoire

Meeting with the Health and Disability Commissioner on 12 December 2025

Date due to MO: 10 December 2025 **Date of Meeting:** 12 December 2025

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Reference:** H2025076135

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
Kirsten Stephenson	Group Manager, Health System Monitoring	s 9(2)(a)
Nicola Holden	Acting Manager, Crown Entity Monitoring	

Aide-Mémoire

Meeting with the Health and Disability Commissioner on 12 December 2025

Date due:	10 December 2025		
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Reference:	H2025076135

About the Meeting

Purpose of Meeting: This meeting was requested by the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC). You last met with the HDC on 24 July 2025.

Details of Meeting:

Date: 12 December 2025
Time: 12.30pm – 1.30pm
Venue: MS Teams

Attendees Morag McDowell, Health and Disability Commissioner and Dr Vanessa Caldwell, Deputy Health and Disability Commissioner, Operations
Ministry representatives Kirsten Stephenson, Group Manager, Health System Monitoring, Performance and Governance.

Other information: HDC will provide you with a separate briefing to support the discussion.

Your office has asked that we also provide you with an update on HDC's management of the workplace wellbeing and welfare concerns that have been raised with you. The Ministry has provided you with this at

Appendix 1.

HDC has said they would like to discuss:

- its current performance
- budget planning
- the Aged Care Commissioner appointment
- their upcoming reports regarding Maternity care and Disabled people's experience of the health system.

Background and context

Financial performance and outlook

1. HDC's total Crown funding for 2025/26 is \$17.801 million. HDC reported a Quarter 1 surplus of \$0.202 million against a planned deficit \$0.298 million. This was due to favourable management of discretionary costs and personnel expenses, with FTEs 12.7 below plan.
2. Equity and cash balances remain strong. Budget 2025 decisions allocated one-off funding to address complaint backlogs in 2024/25 and 2025/26. The forecast year end results now projects a reduced deficit of \$0.116 million for 2025/26 compared to previous quarters.

3. s 9(2)(b)(ii)

4.

Complaints resolution

5. Your April 2025 letter of expectations (LoE) asked HDC to address its backlog and speed up complaints resolution. HDC is on track to return open complaints to pre-Covid numbers by the end of 2026. The Ministry is pleased with HDC's ongoing ability to close more complaints than they receive, as volumes are at record levels.
6. HDC is focusing on complaints that have been unresolved for over two years. In Quarter 2 of 2024/25, these made up 27% (683 complaints) of all open cases, but this figure dropped noticeably to 418 in Quarter 1. Although the percentage of long-standing files remains comparatively high, this is expected because HDC's improved processes now allow for faster triage and quicker resolution of simpler cases as they are received. The Ministry will keep track of HDC's progress in resolving complaints and will share updates as things change.
7. HDC expects its new Client Management System (expected to speed up processes and improve productivity) to be fully operational by March 2026.

Appointments

8. *Health and Disability Commissioner*: You agreed to reappoint Ms McDowell for a two-year term (H2025075009 refers). The Ministry will undertake due diligence activities prior to providing you with appropriate Cabinet and Governor-General documentation in early 2026.

9. *Deputy Commissioner:* The Ministry recently discussed one of the Deputy Commissioner roles with you which will expire in September 2026. The Ministry will provide you with advice for this role and seek confirmation on your preferred approach once the Commissioner's role reappointment has been finalised.
10. *Aged Care Commissioner:* On 27 November 2025, the Health and Disability Commissioner provided the Ministry with a memo recommending her preferred candidate for the role of the Aged Care Commissioner. The Ministry is drafting advice to the responsible appointing Minister, Associate Minister of Health, Hon Casey Costello, which will be provided before the close down period. A copy will also be provided to you for your information.

s 9(2)(ba)(i)



Kirsten Stephenson

Group Manager, Health System Monitoring

Performance and Governance

Date: 10 December 2025

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

s 9(2)(g)(i)



PROACTIVELY RELEASED

	Recommendation	Action/Progress made
1	Articulate HDC's purpose in practice to define how the purpose applies across the different roles and functions at HDC.	Implemented This was included as part of the development of the Staff Charter.
2	Provide clarity on the principles that apply at HDC, such as neutrality, impartiality and independence, and what they mean in practice.	Implemented This was included as part of the development of the Staff Charter. Staff are also periodically reminded of their obligations as public servants.
3	Review the standards of behaviour that apply at HDC and how people are held to account for how they behave and encapsulate them in a Charter of Expectations.	Implemented The Staff Charter was launched in June 2023.
4	Find ways to regularly bring all staff together.	Implemented A weekly all-of-staff meeting was introduced and continues to be held every Monday. We are currently reviewing how these meetings are run and will be conducting a staff survey in December to inform the form and content of these meetings for 2026. Staff are also brought together and connections are built through regular events such as Matariki, Māori language week, end of year celebrations etc. As also mentioned, feedback forums are being conducted in the operational teams. Recently the leadership undertook a workshop which considered, among other things, how to engender better connection between, and with staff. Further work on this is intended for the coming year.
5	Consider the ways in which you can increase	Implemented

	the understanding of what each team does and build connections between teams.	Our all of staff meetings are designed to improve connections between teams, with a different team leading the meeting each week. Our intranet is also used to promote the work undertaken by different teams, and internal training for staff is run by different teams. Note, as above, the recent workshop undertaken by people leaders in December 2025.
6	Review the processes for handling complaints and journey map both the consumer and employee experiences.	Implemented The intention behind this recommendation has been implemented as part of our process re-design work. While it was not feasible to undertake journey mapping (which had already occurred in 2017), significant improvements have been made to our complaints processes since 2022. HDC has a continuous improvement programme and are consistently reviewing and improving our complaints process. Consumer and provider experience surveys were also introduced in 2021 to inform process change. As previously mentioned, feedback forums are being conducted in the operational teams.
7	Explore objective methods for completing cases and ensure there are clear and consistent standards across each team.	Implemented HDC's Standard Operating Procedures have been refreshed and are updated on an on-going basis. Significant improvements have been made to our triage and other complaint processes to ensure clarity and consistency of approach.
8	Develop and implement a recruitment and retention strategy.	Partially implemented ELT decided to focus our limited HR resource on making necessary improvements to our recruitment and retention processes rather than on the development of a strategy. This has included, among other things, implementation of an online recruitment platform, improvements to recruitment and induction processes and documentation, revision of flexible work and leave policies, supervision, and improved and more transparent remuneration policies and practices. Our pay gaps action plan also has a focus on recruitment and remuneration. This plan is publicly available. However, with relevant improvements implemented, work has begun on the development of a strategy and we expect to have one in place next year.
9	Review internal processes for raising complaints and concerns.	Implemented Senior management reviewed the internal process for raising and managing complaints in 2022 and managers were provided with training on complaints management. Staff were informed of an 'open door' approach to managing complaints and concerns (where concerns can be raised with managers or any member of ELT). Refresher training to managers was also provided in 2024.

		Our anti-harassment policy is being reviewed in 2026, and this will provide a further opportunity to ensure these processes are working for staff.
10	Implement a well-being strategy.	Partially implemented In respect of this recommendation, ELT sought to focus on necessary initiatives and actions to improve employee well-being, rather than developing a strategy. In 2022/23 we undertook an external health and safety review to assess how we support staff to manage unreasonable conduct by complainants. Professional supervision for all front-line staff was implemented in 2023/24 in addition to EAP. There is ongoing staff culture work intended for 2026 – and staff wellbeing will be a necessary focus as part of that work. A workshop on psychological safety in the workplace was held with managers and leaders this week which will lead to further work on staff wellbeing and culture.
11	Develop HDC's Employee Value Proposition.	Not implemented This was determined to not be feasible within HDC's resource constraints – however we have sought to implement policies which support employees such as for flexible working and improved leave. Our Staff Charter also clearly sets out our values.
12	Create career pathways for all roles and identify training opportunities to support people with their career pathways.	Partially implemented HDC undertook to improve the transparency and clarity of our recruitment process. Acting-up and secondment opportunities are offered where possible and appropriate, and our performance management framework (which is currently being refreshed) seeks to support professional development of staff. However, the full implementation of this recommendation is not possible in the context of HDC's small size, specialist jurisdiction and constrained budget.
13	Review the workload across the teams and permanent workforce resourcing model.	Implemented Workload capacity and resourcing across teams is considered on an on-going basis by ELT in line with annual budgetary determinations. Team capacity and workload is monitored and adjusted as required. Workloads of staff are actively monitored by managers.