

Office of Hon Simeon Brown

Minister of Health
Minister for State Owned Enterprises
Minister for Auckland



27 March 2026

Morag McDowell
Health and Disability Commissioner
s 9(2)(a)

Dear Morag

I am writing to set out my expectations and priorities for 2026/27. 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 want the health system focused on putting patients first in every decision.

My key areas of focus continue to be:

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

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

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 the HDC to put patient need at the heart of every decision it makes and to prioritise care based on clinical need, not race.

Our system must deliver the best mix of outputs and services possible within current budgets, with a focus on optimising productivity and efficiency. Each entity must play its part for the system to perform as a whole. Where possible and useful, individual entities need to partner with others to find synergies and efficiencies which will help achieve this aim.

The HDC is uniquely placed to observe any changes to the quality of patient care in Health New Zealand's (Health NZ) delivery of services and those in primary care.

Particularly, I expect that the HDC 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 reduce waiting times and address waitlists. I recognise that

most complaints you receive are related to Health NZ. Please continue to engage collaboratively with Health NZ on system-wide issues, including the development of their complaints infrastructure and the implementation of your recommendations. I expect you to continue working to influence and partner with other key organisations, such as the Health Quality and Safety Commission (HQSC) at the National Quality Forum to drive improvements across the health system. When the HDC publishes a thematic report, I expect it to focus on how it will address implications for resolving patient complaints, as well as enhancements in health systems and patient experience.

- **Address the complaints backlog:** I recognise that the number of complaints you are receiving remains high. It is pleasing to see the number of open and unresolved complaints has reduced significantly since my last letter of expectations and I expect that you continue to prioritise resources on the backlog of complaints, especially those aged over 24 months. Once the new customer relations management IT software is embedded, I expect to see improvements in the time it takes to resolve complaints and I want HDC to provide evidence of productivity gains and improved services. In addition, I expect you to share your recommendations data, early notifications data, as well as system issues data with the Ministry of Health (the Ministry). Build this data sharing into your quarterly reports as it will help identify issues as soon as practicable.
- **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 continue 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. The HDC has an important role in influencing the quality of care. I would like to continue to receive regular reports on the impact of the HDC's work on improving quality across the health system.
- **Reflecting my expectations in your accountability documents:** My overarching expectation remains that all health entities are relentless in the pursuit of the delivery of better outcomes and value for New Zealanders. My expectations should form the basis for the development of your accountability documents for the coming financial year. As you prioritise your work programme, please advise me early to discuss any proposed trade-offs that would impact on the full delivery of any of my expectations. Please ensure regular progress updates are provided through your performance reports. I expect you to ensure timely responses continue to be provided to information requests made by the Ministry, as your monitoring agency. I expect you to advise me and the Ministry early if you have any concerns about progress.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your work to date, and I look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to improve health outcomes for all New Zealanders. Please provide a draft of your Statement of Performance Expectations for 2026/27 to your contact at the Ministry by 30 April 2026.

Yours sincerely



Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Health

cc Audrey Sonerson, Director-General, Ministry of Health,
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