

Tēnā koe

## Letter of Expectations for district health boards and subsidiary entities for 2020/21

This letter sets out the Government's expectations for district health boards (DHBs) and their subsidiary entities for 2020/21.

DHBs make positive differences in the lives of New Zealanders and I look forward to working with you and your new Board to deliver the wider changes we need to improve outcomes. Strong and sustained leadership provides a foundation for high-performing DHBs and is critical to overall sector performance.

The Government intends to deliver long term, sustainable change to support improved wellbeing for New Zealanders. In the coming months we will receive the final report from the New Zealand Health and Disability System Review. Many of you have contributed to the review, and I thank you for that. The interim report aligned strongly with our Government's priorities and the changes we have underway to deliver better outcomes for Māori and improving equity and wellbeing. I expect you to be prepared and ready to implement Government decisions resulting from the review.

Wellbeing and equity underpin my priorities. Appendix one details expectations for the five system priorities:

- improving child wellbeing
- improving mental wellbeing
- improving wellbeing through prevention;
- better population outcomes supported by a strong and equitable public health and disability system
- better population health and outcomes supported by primary health care.

This letter will outline my expectations for a range of matters that contribute to performance across these priority outcomes.

### **Governance**

The DHB Board sets the direction for the DHB and rigorously monitors the DHB's financial and non-financial performance and delivery on the Government's priorities.

I expect you to hold your Chief Executive (CE) and senior leadership team to account for their financial performance and on the delivery of equitable health outcomes for your population.

As Chair, you will need to provide leadership and direction to the Board, providing guidance and support to members to ensure they effectively govern the DHB. Please ensure that you have a process in place to review the performance of the Board on a regular basis.

### ***Sustainability***

Every DHB must clearly demonstrate how strategic and service planning will support improved system sustainability, including models of care and the scope of practice of the workforce. You should address how your DHB will work with sector partners to deliver the Government's priorities and outcomes for the health and disability system while reducing cost increases and deficit levels.

Please ensure that your 2020/21 planning documents clearly identify your DHB's approach to financial and clinical sustainability at both a strategic level and operationally across each of my priority areas.

### ***Service performance***

I expect you to challenge and support your CE and senior leadership team to identify ways to respond to the challenges the DHB faces, including timely, high quality delivery of planned care, reducing the length of emergency department stays and increasing immunisation coverage. You will oversee progress on the plans they develop to address these issues.

You need to ensure that workforce and delivery plans support innovative models of care and don't merely add FTE to maintain existing approaches. I expect this to be supplemented with other activities, such as managing annual leave liabilities and maximising productivity in theatres and wards.

### ***Achieving equity***

Achieving equity in health outcomes and ensuring fairness in access to and experience of care is essential. I will always expect you to consider equity as you develop plans across priority areas and to prioritise resources to achieve equity across population groups. This will include improving health outcomes for Maori and Pasifika, and an explicit focus on addressing racism and discrimination in all of its forms across all aspects of your operations.

### ***Embedding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and achieving pae ora (healthy futures) for Māori***

Māori-Crown relations are a priority for this Government, and I expect your DHB to meet your Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations as specified in the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000. I expect you to develop your plans in partnership with your iwi/Māori partnership boards and include a statement from the Chair of the partnership board in your annual plan alongside statements from yourself and your CE.

Achieving pae ora (healthy futures) for Māori is an important goal for the entire health and disability system. While this includes achieving equity in health outcomes for Māori, responding to our obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi goes beyond that. A critical aspect is enabling iwi, hapū, whānau and Māori communities to exercise their authority to improve their health and wellbeing. I expect your plan to specify how you will work with iwi and Māori communities in your district to achieve this goal.

### ***Financial performance and responsibility***

The 2018/19 and 2019/20 budgets have provided the largest increases in funding that DHBs have ever had. To improve service and financial performance, you must focus on good

decision-making within your sphere of control and influence. Most of the issues driving costs are within the control of the DHB, including the number and mix of full-time equivalent staff.

A central challenge in the public health system is to deliver a wide range of quality health services to New Zealanders while remaining within budget. You will be aware of your DHB's financial position and my expectation is that you and your Board will deliver improved financial management and performance; this is especially true for those DHBs that have struggled in recent years.

The In-Between Travel (IBT) appropriation will be devolved from 1 July 2020. I expect you to work with the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) to ensure a seamless transition of responsibilities. The Ministry has an ongoing stewardship responsibility to ensure that all IBT obligations are met.

### ***Capital investment***

Timely delivery of the business cases prioritised for investment from the Budget appropriation should be a strong focus. You must comply with financial performance expectations for capital investments requiring Crown equity. You will also be expected to deliver a business case within the budget parameters set, and ensure all investments are procured in a timely manner.

Business cases for high priority projects should continue to be developed irrespective of their immediate investment status and I will seek your assurance that this work is progressing.

I expect all DHBs to follow the guidelines for construction procurement developed by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. I also expect DHBs to support the initiatives being developed under the Construction Accord. Information on these initiatives will be provided as the work develops.

The Government is supporting a range of capital infrastructure initiatives. The wider public good from our capital projects must be realised, which requires adherence to certain principles. An example is the NZ Green Building Council (NZGBC) Green Star rating for new building developments. Capital builds ought to meet a 5-star standard in the absence of any other mature standard, and this aim should be written into design thinking from the outset. This should result in longer term efficiencies, both financial and environmental. During 2020/21, you will need to engage with the Ministry and other partners as we continue to evolve approaches to sustainable facility design.

### ***National Asset Management Plan***

I would like to thank your DHB for supporting the first iteration of the National Asset Management Plan (NAMP) and ask that you continue to engage with the NAMP work as we develop and implement the next phases. Please continue to strengthen your DHB's asset management approach, including focusing on critical service assets, embedding asset management practices and ensuring you appropriately govern service improvement and asset performance.

### ***Service user councils***

Service user/consumer councils are key mechanisms through which service users can give feedback on how health and disability services are delivered in different communities. The Health Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) has provided guidance to support an effective approach – 'Engaging with consumers: A guide for district health boards' and 'Progressing consumer engagement in primary care'. I am aware that many DHBs already

have strong service user councils and I want to strengthen this across all districts and regions.

The Commission, in partnership with the sector, has developed quality and safety markers for service user engagement and I encourage your DHB to participate in this.

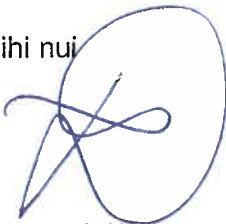
***My priority areas***

I have clearly communicated my priorities for the health system. I expect your annual plans to address these priorities to meet the needs of all population groups, especially those groups that experience the most significant inequities. The actions you commit to in your plan must contribute to lasting equity and outcome improvements for Māori and for your Pacific population, including a strong focus on prevention. Appendix one details expectations for the five system priorities, which will be further described in the planning guidance your DHB receives from the Ministry.

I look forward to engaging with you on your planning intentions, receiving your planning documents for 2020/21 and working with you as your DHB delivers on your commitments. I appreciate you are receiving this letter at a time when our system is facing emerging pressures from COVID-19. I am pleased to see the way the sector has worked together during the early response phase and I know DHBs will continue to support our collective system response.

Thank you for your continued dedication and efforts to provide high quality and equitable health care and outcomes for New Zealanders.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' and 'C' intertwined.

Hon Dr David Clark  
**Minister of Health**

## **Appendix one: Ministerial planning priority areas**

### **Improving child wellbeing**

The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and Programme of Action (the Strategy) launched in August 2019 provides a clear pathway to ensuring New Zealand is the best place in the world for children and young people to live. I expect your annual plans to reflect how you are working to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children, young people and their whanau. Your plans should focus on improving equity of outcomes (especially for Māori); on children and young people of interest to Oranga Tamariki; and children with greater need, including children and young people with disabilities.

I expect DHBs to increase childhood immunisation rates, especially for Māori. The recent measles outbreaks remind us of the impact of communicable diseases on our communities and the health sector and the importance of achieving full immunisation. I expect DHBs to work closely with their primary care providers to prioritise immunisation, including a renewed focus on robust pre-call and recall processes and immunisation outreach services.

I expect DHBs to focus on family and sexual violence screening, early intervention and prevention to ensure victims and families receive effective and timely health care and perpetrators are supported to break the cycle of family and sexual violence.

High quality maternity care is fundamental to ensure children get the best possible start in life. As part of their commitment to the Midwifery Accord signed in April 2019, I expect DHBs to implement a plan to improve recruitment and retention of midwives. You should use Care Capacity Demand Management (CCDM) work to ensure optimal staffing in maternity facilities.

Working with a full range of stakeholders, the Ministry has developed a comprehensive Maternity Action Plan to support a flexible, innovative and sustainable maternity system. I expect DHBs to work with all elements of the maternity system to ensure responsiveness to Māori and equitable access to quality maternity care, including maternal and infant mental health services.

### **Improving mental wellbeing**

*He Ara Oranga: Report on the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction* and the Government's response, has set a clear direction for mental wellbeing in New Zealand. Supported by the investments announced in the 2019 Wellbeing Budget, we have a unique opportunity to improve the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealanders. Your leadership will drive system transformation in the mental health and addiction sector.

Collective action is needed to achieve equity of outcomes, in particular for Māori, as well as for other population groups who experience disproportionately poorer outcomes, including Pacific peoples, youth and Rainbow communities. You will work with the Ministry, the Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and the Suicide Prevention Office to support system transformation and the rollout of the Government's priority initiatives.

The mental health and addiction system must respond to people at different life stages and levels of need. I expect DHBs to work individually and collectively on mental health and addiction promotion, prevention and early intervention at the primary and community level. At the specialist end of the continuum you should ensure those with the most need have access to sustainable quality mental health and addiction services.

Improving New Zealanders' mental wellbeing will require collaboration with communities and non-government organisations (NGOs). I consider that DHBs have a social responsibility to

support the sustainability of NGOs and to empower communities to engage in the transformation of New Zealand's approach to mental health and addiction. This includes offering your expertise at no charge to NGOs and community organisations to support participation in new service delivery, particularly for communities who experience disproportionately poorer outcomes.

I expect you to contribute to the development of a sustainable and skilled workforce. You must invest to diversify, train and expand both the existing and new workforces. You should focus on training workforces to support the Government's primary mental health and addiction initiatives and communicate proactively with the Ministry about opportunities to expand coverage to reach underserved populations.

### ***Improving wellbeing through prevention***

#### *Environmental sustainability*

Ensure that you continue to contribute to our Government's priority of environmental sustainability, including green and sustainable facility design as noted above in the section on Capital Investment. I expect your annual plan to reflect your work to progress actions to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and enhance the co-benefits to health from these actions.

#### *Antimicrobial resistance*

I am concerned about the increasing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) to our health security. DHBs have a key role in minimising this threat. The issues are systemic and require long-term planning and sustained actions.

I expect your annual plan to reflect actions that align with the objectives of the New Zealand Antimicrobial Resistance Action Plan and demonstrate you are working towards a sustainable approach to containing AMR.

#### *Smokefree 2025*

Smoking remains a major preventable cause of premature death, morbidity and health inequities. My expectation is that you work towards achieving Smokefree 2025. I expect to see effective community-based wrap-around interventions to support people who want to stop smoking, with a focus on Māori, Pacific people, pregnant women and those on a low income. The interventions should reflect your regional and programme provider collaborative efforts.

#### *Bowel Screening*

The National Bowel Screening Programme remains a priority for this Government. DHBs are expected to achieve national bowel screening targets (where applicable) and consistently meet diagnostic colonoscopy wait times. It is crucial that symptomatic patients are not negatively impacted by screening demand. DHBs must work individually and collectively to develop a sustainable endoscopy workforce, including support of training positions for nursing and medical trainees to meet growing demand in this area.

## ***Better population health outcomes supported by a strong and equitable public health and disability system***

### *National Cancer Action Plan*

On 1 September 2019 the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern and I launched the National Cancer Action Plan and its four key outcomes. DHBs have an important responsibility to drive the necessary changes and deliver of these outcomes.

I have established a National Cancer Control Agency, which will report to me on the implementation of the Cancer Action Plan. You will work with and take direction from the Agency to reach national standards of care and improve quality.

### *Disability*

Disabled people experience significant health inequalities and they should be able to access the same range of health services as the general population. Your DHB should look for opportunities to increase its employment of disabled people to improve the competency and awareness of your workforce in matters regarding disabled people and to advance social inclusion more generally.

Accessibility means that your DHB provides a barrier-free environment, including information and communications for the independence, convenience and safety of a diverse range of people. This includes people who may have access needs, including disabled people, older people, parents and carers of young children and travellers.

Enabling disabled people to access health services includes ensuring that all key public health information and alerts are translated into New Zealand Sign Language. It means consulting disabled patients (including people with sensory, intellectual or physical impairments) on their preferred means of communication for appointment notifications and the like.

As with previous years, your DHB must make progress towards, or fully implement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. DHBs also need to implement policies and procedures to collect information about disabled people within your patient population. DHBs should also ensure contracts with providers reflect the requirement to either ensure accessibility or put in place plans to transition to a more accessible service.

### *Healthy ageing*

If our ageing population continues to grow as current trends suggest, the number of people with dementia, and the associated financial and social consequences, will grow commensurately. This Government is determined to make a positive difference in the lives of people with dementia, their families, whānau, friends and communities. I expect your DHB to work with your region to implement the regional dementia priorities.

Please ensure the DHB develops models of care to identify frail and vulnerable older people in community settings, in particular Māori and Pacific peoples, and provides supports to restore function and prevent the need for acute care.

### *Workforce*

I expect DHBs to develop bargaining strategies that progress the Government Expectations on Employment Relations in the State Sector.

I expect bargaining strategies to progress consistent employment arrangements and support agile, innovative workforces to deliver services. Employment arrangements should encourage people to grow, develop and thrive in a work environment that supports transdisciplinary teams and innovative models of care. I expect commitments made in bargaining to be met, including working party commitments, Accords or programmes, such as the CCDM programme.

DHBs have an essential role in training our future workforce and providing learning and development opportunities for current workforces. I expect you to continue to utilise current workforces to support innovative and transdisciplinary practice across models of care and enable people to work to their full scope of practice.

DHBs must create environments in which all health and disability workforces thrive. DHBs should facilitate healthy and culturally reinforcing working environments that support health equity outcomes for all.

#### *Workplace violence*

I am concerned about what appears to be increased levels of violence in the health workplace. In accordance with the Health and Safety Act 2016, DHBs are responsible for the health and safety of their staff, patients and visitors. I expect DHBs to keep staff, patients and visitors safe by implementing appropriate policies, procedures and training to maintain public trust and confidence in the health and disability sector.

#### *Health Research Strategy implementation*

Research and innovation, analytics and technology are all crucial to achieving an equitable, sustainable health system and better patient outcomes.

The New Zealand Health Research Strategy (2017-2027) is the key platform for us all and it is important to implement the strategic priorities. In the next year, we should focus on developing a flourishing research and innovation culture in our DHBs in both primary and secondary care.

I have asked the Ministry to work with you and other stakeholders to build up DHB people and resources to support and enhance research, innovation and analytics so the system can make better use of the evidence and innovation and contribute to the Health Research Strategy objectives. Please work with the Ministry to design and invest in the programme of work with a focus on creating regional research and analytics networks that support staff engaged with research and innovation.

#### *National Health Information Platform (nHIP/Hira)*

Digital health services are important to me and to all New Zealanders and I expect DHBs to ensure the digital services you use are safe, secure, integrated, reliable and provide appropriate access to data and information.

I also expect you to support the Ministry in developing and designing nHIP/Hira services and to prioritise nHIP/Hira implementation activities in your annual plan.

#### *Planned care*

The refreshed approach to deliver elective and arranged services, under a broader planned care programme, will build on the development of the three-year plan you started in 2019/20. Timely access to planned care remains a priority. I urge you to take advantage of the increased flexibility in where and how you deliver these services; to ensure improved equity



of access and sustainability of service delivery; and to provide services that meet your population's health care needs, support timely care and make the best use of your workforce and resources.

I am particularly concerned, across many DHBs, about the number of people waiting beyond expectations for first specialist assessments, planned care interventions, ophthalmology follow-ups and diagnostic radiology services. Please ensure you have appropriate plans in place to support timely care.

#### *Measuring Health System Performance*

The System Level Measures (SLM) programme provides a framework for continuous quality improvement and integration across the health system. I intend to build upon the SLM framework by publicising local progress in responding to my national priorities from quarter one 2020/21. I expect DHBs to work with all health system partners to agree local actions and the contributory measures needed to make a tangible impact on health system performance. This will require broadening of alliances to include partners beyond the primary health organisations (PHOs). Equity gaps are evident in all SLMs and in nearly all districts. Where equity gaps exist, I expect local actions and contributory measures to focus on addressing these gaps.

#### *Care Capacity Demand Management*

I continue to expect significant progress on implementing all components of the CCDM programme this year, including detailed plans for full implementation in all units in nursing and midwifery by June 2021. Full implementation includes annual FTE calculations and agreed budgeted FTE in place. I expect timely reporting, including your assessment on progress towards meeting the June 2021 deadline for full implementation of CCDM. It is vital that nurses and midwives see the impact of CCDM FTE increases and effective variance response management on safe staffing levels and that the core data set drives quality improvement. It remains my expectation that CE performance expectations include delivering CCDM expectations within agreed timelines.

#### ***Better population health outcomes supported by primary health care***

##### *Primary care*

Primary care makes a significant contribution to improving health outcomes and reducing demand on hospital services. Continuing to improve primary health care remains a priority for this Government.

DHBs must work with their primary care partners and lead their alliance(s) to develop and implement models of care that improve equity for Māori and other high needs populations through services that target the needs of these populations. I expect these new models of care to use broader multi-disciplinary teams, strengthened inter-professional collaboration and improved integration between secondary, primary and community care. I expect high-quality information and data to be shared through formal agreements and used to support decision-making, particularly in improving outcomes for Māori.

##### *Long-term conditions*

As I have previously advised, I expect DHBs to explicitly require improvements in performance and reporting on long-term conditions in their contracts with PHOs. DHBs should incentivise PHOs to improve equity, reduce the burden of long-term conditions, demonstrate improvements in primary care settings and increase accountability for effectively managing long-term conditions, especially diabetes.

### *Pharmacy*

Progress has been made on the strategic vision of the Pharmacy Action Plan 2016. I expect this progress to accelerate as you work with the pharmacy sector to develop funding models and models of care that are equity focused and centred on service users. Please ensure your DHB enables pharmacist vaccinators to deliver a broader range of vaccinations to improve access.

### *Rural workforce*

DHBs with rural communities should build on 2019/20 and improve access to services for rural people. I expect you and your rural alliance partners, including rural hospitals, to explore the opportunities to use the Ministry's rural workforce initiatives to strengthen your rural workforce and improve the sustainability of rural services.

### *Supporting delivery of the Māori health action plan*

The sector has recently engaged in the development of a Māori Health Action Plan to further implement He Korowai Oranga: the Māori Health Strategy and improve Māori health outcomes. I expect all DHBs to demonstrate delivery and implementation of this plan in 2020/21 planning documents.

### *Improving wellbeing through public health service delivery*

Public Health Units (PHUs) are key to protecting and improving health and you should ensure that your DHB has strong and sustainable public health capability and capacity. I expect to see PHU plans integrated with DHB Annual Plans where appropriate in 2020/21.

Over the next year, a programme is underway to develop criteria and to confirm the accountability arrangements for public health service delivery. I encourage your PHU and DHB to get involved in this process and support the programme.