Tēnā koe (Chair)

UPDATE: Letter of Expectations for district health boards and subsidiary entities for 2019/20

This letter sets out an update to the Government’s expectations for district health boards (DHBs) and their subsidiary entities for 2019/20. This builds on my December 2018 letter, attached for your reference. I want to emphasise that my strong focus remains on the expectations set out in that letter.

I also want to acknowledge your engagement with the important conversations we have been having on improving financial sustainability and clinical performance.

While I recognise there are a number of challenges, it is my expectation that DHBs ensure their local communities can access high quality sustainable services that deliver equitable outcomes.

**Wellbeing Budget**

Budget 2019 is about delivering better wellbeing for all New Zealanders and driving intergenerational change. There are five key priorities – taking mental health seriously, improving child poverty, supporting Māori and Pasifika aspirations, building a productive nation, and transforming the economy.

Budget 2019 builds on last year’s Vote Health investment. A record $19.871 billion is being invested for 2019/20 to support a stronger, more sustainable health and disability system.

Our Government has signalled a willingness not just to invest, but also to make the fundamental changes needed to deliver long term and sustainable change. Budget initiatives are also based around evidence on what will make the greatest contribution to the long term improvement of living standards and wellbeing.

**Monitoring improved performance**

High performing DHBs are needed to support the delivery of the Government’s priorities. I am concerned about the sector’s overall financial position, and some areas of service performance.

As you are aware I have worked with the Ministry of Health (Ministry) to ensure DHB performance is supported through a stronger performance programme. This will help DHBs to be more sustainable, and to improve financial and clinical performance to ensure better and more equitable outcomes for New Zealanders. I have made it clear that you have a responsibility to address the range of performance challenges in partnership with the Ministry.

Your DHB’s performance will be reported to me regularly, and I support the use of data and benchmarking to identify variation as well as opportunities for improvement. This will also support collaboration across DHBs regionally and nationally to make the most of our
collective capability. I expect all DHBs to contribute to, and participate in, such work to help ensure the system is safe, equitable, efficient, and maximises the resource use across the whole system.

**Fiscal responsibility**

I have made my expectations on improving financial performance very clear, and DHBs need to have a plan to return to financial sustainability.

You have been provided with your confirmed budget allocations for 2019/20 and I expect you to be considering ways to contain expenditure, including maximising available capability and resources in the system, tightly managing recruitment and staff leave, and improving consistency of clinical pathways and decision-making.

Continuing to do things in the same way as we are now is not sustainable operationally, clinically or financially. There will be a dedicated focus in 2019/20 on strengthening sustainability planning and establishing an on-going sustainability programme.

You will be aware that Budget 2019 invests an extra $94.7 million over four years to help improve DHB financial sustainability. This new funding will enable DHBs to work more collaboratively across your regions, to share and build on best practice, to implement new service models that transform the way we use workforce and facilities, and to make the best use of the available funding and capacity in your region.

**Capital investment**

Budget 2019 invests $1.7 billion over two years for capital investment projects, building on last year’s investment to restore our hospitals and health facilities. This funding will be prioritised for mental health projects, high growth areas with increased demand, and health facilities that are no longer fit for purpose. I urge that in all investment, environmental sustainability be a significant consideration.

Some business cases for new infrastructure projects are already well advanced and have been indicatively prioritised for consideration. I expect this process to be completed with DHBs being advised of the outcomes in July/August 2019.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment is developing a new framework which will focus on skills development and training as a requirement of construction projects. New construction procurement guidelines will also be applied across government. I expect you to apply the changes to the procurement of new construction projects.

**National Asset Management Plan**

In the long term, we need to better map out future infrastructure requirements. This will enable the Government to make more informed decisions, and better prioritise remediation work and plan for new facilities.

I am pleased that you are actively supporting the National Asset Management Plan programme of work. I expect that any requests for information from the project team are responded to in a timely manner.

It is also my expectation that you will update your DHB’s Asset Management Plans. These are a requirement of the Ministry, and will assist in the formulation of the capital investment pipeline, and the ongoing work on the National Asset Management Plan.
The Budget also provides some funding to lift capacity and capability within the Ministry, notably to establish a new health infrastructure unit that will provide better support to DHBs.

**Update on my priority areas**

**Improving child wellbeing**

As you know, child wellbeing is a key priority for this Government. I expect your annual plans to reflect how you are actively working to improve childhood immunisation coverage and eliminate inequity, especially for Māori.

As I have said in my earlier letter of expectations, I expect you to support the reduction of family violence and sexual violence through addressing abuse as a fundamental healthcare responsibility.

**Improving mental wellbeing**

Mental health and addiction is a top priority in the Wellbeing Budget with $1.9 billion over four years being invested into a range of mental wellbeing initiatives and mental health and addiction facilities. These strongly align with the Government’s response to He Ara Oranga, the report of the independent inquiry into mental health and addiction.

We have a unique opportunity to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders. We need to embed a focus on wellbeing and equity at all points of the system. We also need to focus more on mental health promotion, prevention, identification, and early intervention.

It is my expectation that you will work closely with the Ministry and key partners in your region to help drive this transformation; your leadership is essential.

**Improving wellbeing through prevention**

Our Government’s vision is for a welfare system that ensures people have an adequate income and standard of living, are treated with respect, can live in dignity and are able to participate meaningfully in their communities. DHBs have an important and ongoing role working alongside social sector partners to improve the welfare and health system outcomes for their population.

I have introduced a new priority section in DHB annual plans, given the considerable overlaps between people engaging with the welfare system as well as the health and disability support system. Over half the proportion of working age people receiving a main benefit have a health condition or a disability, or care for someone with a health condition or disability.

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

**Planned Care**

I am confident that the changes to how planned care is planned, funded and monitored will remove the current disincentives to developing better ways of delivering services.

The new planned care approach will enable DHBs to deliver more appropriate, timely, high quality services to support the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders. DHBs will be able to provide care in the most appropriate setting, with the right workforce.
There will also be a greater focus on equity, quality, and people's experience of our services. I expect DHBs to create robust plans for these services and to consistently meet volume, waiting time, and other quality expectations.

*Cancer Action Plan*

I have asked the Ministry to work with you and other stakeholders to develop a Cancer Action Plan. I expect you to support and drive the development of this important work, and to deliver on the local actions within your Plan.

*Health Research Strategy Implementation*

Research, evidence and innovation is critical to addressing inequities and in continuously improving the quality and outcomes of services provided.

I am aware that the Ministry is working with DHBs and other government agencies to develop a work programme to implement the Health Research Strategy. I encourage you to continue to work closely with the Ministry to progress this important work.

*Workforce*

DHBs have a key role in training our health and disability workforce. I expect that all DHBs continue to maintain a strong focus on this area to build capacity and capability, and to implement an equitable approach to funding professional development.

In your current annual plan I expect you to develop a sustainable approach to nursing career pathways, including actions to support equitable funding for professional development for nurse practitioners.

*Care Capacity Demand Management*

At the end of last year I outlined my expectation that DHBs are to implement Care Capacity Demand Management (CCDM) in line with the process and timetable set out in the 2018-2020 MECA.

I expect to see significant progress on CCDM implementation this year, as well as detailed planning to ensure full implementation by June 2021.

I expect you to confirm that you have met my expectation to include implementing CCDM in the performance expectations of your Chief Executive and that you are updating these expectations to include implementation in midwifery services.

*Devolution of the pay equity appropriation*

I have supported the devolution of the pay equity appropriation. I expect you to work with the Ministry to ensure a seamless transition of responsibilities.

The Ministry has an ongoing stewardship responsibility to ensure that Care and Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlement Act obligations are met.
The Government’s agenda to improve the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders is significant, as evidenced by the sizable investments being made. I am confident that DHBs will present strong plans to support delivery of our priorities and I am looking forward to seeing progress against both measures and activities during the year.

I have appreciated the willingness shown by DHB teams to focus on equity and outcomes, and have confidence that you will all embrace the direction and implement plans to deliver it.

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

Ngā mihi nui

[Signature]

Hon Dr David Clark
Minister of Health