

A Collective Letter: Inquiring about the Government's Plan for Addressing Māori Health Inequities in the Absence of Te Aka Whai Ora (The Māori Health Authority)

Dear Hon Dr Shane Reti,

This letter is written on behalf of the 740 undersigned doctors of Aotearoa New Zealand. We are deeply committed to addressing longstanding health inequities experienced by Māori communities. We write today with sincere concern regarding the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora and seeking clarity on this government's specific plans to address Māori health inequities in the absence of Te Aka Whai Ora to guide and lead this kaupapa.

The inequity of health outcomes for Māori have been demonstrated consistently in research, up to the current day. It is imperative that health practitioners are empowered to undertake the vital mahi of closing the health gap. Equity-based practice is an evidence-based practice which enables the medical profession to undertake that task and uphold our obligations to our Māori patients under Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

Professor Papaarangi Reid outlined the causes behind the ethnic inequities in health in *Hauora: Māori Standards of Health*. She importantly highlighted that Māori mortality rates cannot be explained through socio-economic status alone - indeed, among males, Māori mortality rates average 2 times higher than those of non-Māori living in the same deprivation decile areas.

Equity-based practice is also effective, efficient practice. Paine et al estimated in The New Zealand Medical Journal the economic cost of health inequities for Māori children to taxpayers to be \$175 million NZD per year, and Reid et al published in the British Medical Journal the "conservative estimate" that health inequities between Māori and non-Māori adults cost \$863.3 million NZD per year.

The establishment of Te Aka Whai Ora, which is still in its infancy, was a significant step towards addressing these vitally important issues. Te Aka Whai Ora empowered the Māori medical community to invest directly in kaupapa Māori health services, develop the Māori workforce, embed mātauranga Māori into the health system, all under a strong leadership at a high systems level. Indeed, addressing issues that lead to poor health outcomes for Māori has benefited many other members of the community who are exposed to the same drivers of poor health.

Given the importance of ensuring health equity in Aotearoa, we write seeking clarity on the government's plan for addressing Māori health inequities:

- Given the coalition agreement to abolish Te Aka Whai Ora, we would like to hear how the coalition plans to ensure that the groundwork and initiatives developed by Te Aka Whai Ora towards addressing inequities will continue.
- We request specific information on initiatives, policies and programs the coalition will implement to continue the positive momentum in improving health outcomes for Māori communities outlined by *Pae Tū: Hauora Māori Strategy* and *Whakamaua: Māori Health Action Plan*.
- Te Aka Whai Ora was providing a leadership role. We seek specific information on what political and medical leadership will look like moving forward.
- We request information on which performance indicators the government will be targeting, what the reporting framework will look like in the absence of Te Aka Whai Ora, and where accountability will lie for system performance in Māori health.
- We seek specifics on a Māori Workforce Plan for the health sector in the absence of Te Aka Whai Ora to match community needs.

We appreciate your time and attention to this letter, request a reply by Monday 19th February 2024 and look forward to hearing your response.

Nāku iti noa, nā,

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Dr Vicki Martin (FRNZGP)
Dr Vicki Robertson (FRANZCOG)
Dr Vicki Shaw
Dr Victor Lu
Dr Victoria Francis (FRANZCR)
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Dr Victoria Utley
Dr Vidyalyiny Yugaraja
Dr Vivian Fu (FRACP PhD)
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Dr Vivienne Acker
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Dr Waverley Gee
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Dr Zahra Derhamy
Dr Zhenggu Michael Zang
Dr Zoe Neilson
Prof Chris Jackson (FRACP)
Prof John Bushnell (PhD FRNZCCPsych)
Prof Marie Bismark (FRANZCP FAFPHM)

The following entities also requested to be listed as co-signatories on the letter:

Te Kāhui Manukura o Kai Ora (The Māori Dieticians Association)
Ora Taiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council
STONZ (Speciality Trainees of New Zealand)