

Media Statement

5 December 2023

Opportunities abound for new Health Minister

Incoming Minister of Health Dr Shane Reti has the opportunity to resolve long standing issues in New Zealand's health system, from workforce challenges to persistent health inequalities, to banning harmful Direct To Consumer Advertising of Prescription Medicines, says the Council of Medical Colleges in New Zealand (CMC).

CMC Chair Dr Samantha Murton said the whole medical profession encourages the new Minister to seize the opportunities in front of the new government to improve health outcomes for Māori and increase our supply of home-grown doctors.

There are four strategic priorities for CMC. These are: bringing about the Pae Ora; a healthy, culturally safe, well-trained workforce; collaboration with other organisations; and advocacy. The coalition agreements have an impact on these areas of focus.

"The Council of Medical Colleges believe our health workforce in New Zealand should reflect the population we serve. We want to see a robust, well-trained culturally safe health workforce that meets the needs of our patients and whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand," Dr Murton said.

"We welcome efforts to increase the number of home-grown health practitioners, look after and retain our hard-working health workforce, and supplement our homegrown workforce with well-inducted and well-supported international recruits."

The percentage of both Māori and Pasifika health workers does not reflect their percentage in the population. -Medical Council Data shows that Māori Doctors make up less than five percent of those who-currently hold a practising certificate, and Pasifika doctors make up around two percent. Statistics New Zealand data shows that Māori make up 17 percent of our population, and those of Pasifika descent make up 9.1 percent.

"The Council of Medical Colleges supports efforts by initiatives like MAPAS and the Otago University Mirror on Society Policy to equitably represent Māori and Pasifika medical students and trainees to ensure we have a health-workforce as diverse as the communities we serve," Dr Murton said.

"We expect that any effort put into increasing the medical workforce will focus on growing our own – and we support initiatives to increase medical student numbers."

The Council of Medical Colleges are committed to bringing about Pae Ora (healthy futures) and equitable health outcomes for Māori, by aligning with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and partnering with major stakeholders in Māori health.

We acknowledge racism as a social determinant of health, and advocate for institutional racism and bias within health system structures to be eliminated.

We are concerned that the Governments plan to abolish the Māori Health Authority | Te Aka Whai Ora, will reduce the focus on tackling these issues. CMC want to work constructively with the Government to ensure that progress toward achieving equity in the health system is not lost during their reforms.

There is widespread concern in the medical profession about the Government's plan to repeal the Smoke Free Environments Act and Regulated Products Act.

"This issue is simple: smoking kills. Nicotine is highly addictive. Medical practitioners witness first-hand the preventable death and disease caused by smoked tobacco products; and the inequitable health outcomes that smoked tobacco products contribute to for our Māori and Pasifika communities."

The Council of Medical Colleges expect that any amendments made to Smokefree Legislation will continue to reduce the use, and health impact, of smoked tobacco and nicotine products.

"Medical professionals around the country were heartened when Dr Reti joined calls for a ban on direct to consumer advertising of prescription medicines. With the repeal of the Therapeutic Products Act, it is essential that this stance banning direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines is maintained.

"Banning harmful Direct to Consumer Advertising of Prescription Medicines would save thousands of hours of doctors time and has the potential to significantly reduce the over use of medications."

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About CMC

The Council of Medical Colleges is the collective voice for seventeen medical colleges in New Zealand, it's key focus is to ensure a safe, well-trained medical workforce, and in turn the highest quality medical care for Aotearoa New Zealand.

CMC comprises members from all seventeen medical colleges, who in turn provide support to over 9000 medical practitioners working in a range of 34 specialties in the Aotearoa New Zealand health system.