



Health and Disability Commissioner
Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga

Aotearoa New Zealand can provide global leadership on mental health and wellbeing – Mental Health Commissioner

Aotearoa New Zealand has the opportunity to provide global leadership in responding to mental distress and addiction says Mental Health Commissioner Kevin Allan.

He today released the report *Aotearoa New Zealand's mental health and addiction services: The monitoring and advocacy report of the Mental Health Commissioner* – an independent assessment of the state of services.

“We are a village of five million, if we get this right we can show what is possible when you shift from a mainly service based response to mental distress and addiction to a whole-of-community response focussed on wellbeing and recovery.

“*He Ara Oranga* has set the direction but much more needs to be done to get us there. Government needs to partner with Māori, tāngata whaiora and their whānau, and to engage people and communities in transformational change. There must be a shared agenda that delivers clarity of vision, execution and accountability, as well as support to make it happen.”

The monitoring and advocacy report makes a number of recommendations to the Minister of Health, including the development, by the end of the year, of a clear plan of action to deliver on the approach set out in *He Ara Oranga*.

Mr Allan says there has been significant progress since his last full report in 2018 – notably an increase in early support available through primary and community care, laying the foundations for a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and the Ministry of Health's investment in building its capability to provide stewardship and leadership.

He says that while he welcomes the shift in focus towards better support for people with mild/moderate needs, there is still a pressing need to improve services for people with complex and ongoing needs, including connections to wider social supports.

Mr Allan says the most urgent areas to address include:

- Ensuring all mental health services and addiction services work for Māori and are culturally safe
- Reducing high rates of compulsion under the Mental Health Act and the increasing use of seclusion, especially for Māori
- Increasing support for people who experience harm from substance use, including a broader focus on prevention, harm reduction and continuing care
- Improving mental health and addiction services for pregnant women and new mothers, including more integrated care for women and their babies. Suicide is the leading cause of maternal mortality, with Māori whānau most affected

- Expanding the capacity of forensic mental health services. There has been a 25 percent increase in the prison population since 2013 and an increase in the prevalence of serious mental illness among prisoners, but hardly any increase in forensic mental health capacity
- Supporting specialist mental health and addiction services, which are under pressure, so they can better meet current demand while shifting their approach to support a wellbeing and recovery-oriented system.

Mr Allan says many of the issues he raises in this report are “stubbornly similar” to those he has raised previously.

There are, however, signs of progress, including increased investment in kaupapa Māori approaches.

“All services need to work for Māori and be culturally safe. Strengthening Māori participation and leadership in the design and delivery of services is essential – both for improving outcomes and meeting obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.”

The collective response to supporting people’s wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights what is possible, he says.

“The rapid action to house people without a home and provide intensive mental health, addiction, and other support shows what can be achieved when there is a will.

“We are small enough, smart enough and nimble enough to do this in a way that’s much harder to do in a bigger population and a bigger system.”

Further information

For further information, contact Janine Stewart, Office of the Health & Disability Commissioner, on 022 013 293. A copy of the report can be found here <https://www.hdc.org.nz/news-resources/search-resources/mental-health/monitoring-and-advocacy-report-of-the-mental-health-commissioner-2020/>