



Health and Disability Commissioner
Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga

7 July 2020

Hon. Chris Hipkins
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

By email: c.hipkins@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister Hipkins

Pressing need for action plan for mental wellbeing reforms

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Health and best wishes in your new role.

Action plan to implement the He Ara Oranga agenda required by 31 December 2020

I wish to bring a recommendation I recently made to Minister Clark to your attention as I regard it as a pressing issue for the Government to address in order to achieve its mental wellbeing reforms.

I released my most recent independent monitoring report on mental health and addiction services on 17 July 2020 (see link below) and briefed Minister Clark on it prior to release. Recommendation six calls for an action plan, by 31 December 2020, to implement the *He Ara Oranga* agenda. It states, in full, that I recommend the Minister of Health work with Ministerial colleagues to:

- a. Prepare an action plan, by 31 December 2020, for implementing the transformative *He Ara Oranga* agenda to improve wellbeing, including all-of-government, all-of-community and specific health and disability sector components.
- b. Ensure that the plan has clarity of vision, execution, and accountability including, as a priority, to identify which minister and Government agency will be responsible for leading the action plan and coordinating the collective effort required to implement it.
- c. Develop governance arrangements for Māori, people with lived experience, providers, and other sector leaders to partner with Government in the co-creation and implementation of the action plan.

Good progress has been made in implementing some recommendations from *He Ara Oranga* including improving access to early support services and establishing a new, standalone, Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. However, *He Ara Oranga* requires a whole of community, whole of government action plan to succeed. It is about much more than a health agenda. While the Ministry's COVID recovery plan, *Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa*, provides a helpful foundation for this work, the need for a broader plan of action is now pressing because it will be two years, in November, since *He Ara Oranga* was released.

You may also be interested to know, as Minister of State Services, that I noted in my report that the provisions in the Public Service Legislation Bill are purpose built to help implement the cross-agency action required by the *He Ara Oranga* agenda.

An immediate, easily addressed need is for public clarity about which minister and Government agency will be responsible for leading this work. As I note in my report it may be that the Ministry of Health is best placed to lead the whole of system change required but there is a need for a transparent decision that enables accountability for action. Failure to address recommendation six of my report in a timely way risks significant loss of traction in improving mental wellbeing of New Zealanders.

I would, therefore, appreciate your early response to this recommendation.

Response to other recommendations

I made 25 recommendations to the Minister of Health in my report. I appreciate the government will need time to consider and respond to all of the recommendations. I would, however, appreciate that response by **30 November 2020**.

A copy of my full report, a summary of key points and press release is available at:
<https://www.hdc.org.nz/news-resources/search-resources/mental-health/monitoring-and-advocacy-report-of-the-mental-health-commissioner-2020/>

Transparent advocacy

Given HDC's statutory role as an independent advocate in relation to improving mental health and addiction services, I propose to publish this letter and your responses on the Health and Disability Commissioner's website, as I have done previously.

I have copied this letter to Hayden Wano, Chair of the Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, with whom I liaise closely during the transition of HDC's mental health and addiction services monitoring role to the new Commission, and the Ministry of Health for their information.

Further discussion

I am happy to discuss these issues and my monitoring report further with you.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Allan
Mental Health Commissioner

CC Hayden Wano, Chair, Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission
Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General, Ministry of Health
Robyn Shearer, Deputy Director-General, Mental Health, Ministry of Health