



Health and Disability Commissioner
Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga

Media release: Aged Care Commissioner Carolyn Cooper calls for action to improve access to health and disability care for older people

Embargoed until 7 March 6am

A report released today by the Aged Care Commissioner Carolyn Cooper highlights the need for action to meet the ongoing health and disability needs of older people.

The Aged Care Commissioner makes 20 recommendations to improve quality of care in her report, which is underpinned by the voices of older people, their whānau, carers and providers.

“Following conversations with older people and their whānau, I have significant concerns about access to, and coordination of, health and disability services,” Ms Cooper said.

She says older people are enormously valuable in our communities. “With quality, accessible health and disability care they can maintain their independence and dignity and contribute to their communities for longer.”

“At the moment older people are not always able to access home and community support or residential care when needed and the sustainability of these workforces needs to be prioritised.”

The report points to a lack of integration in health and disability services for older people. “This shows up in issues like avoidable hospital admissions or older people staying in hospital longer than they need to because they lack alternative options,” Ms Cooper said.

“Not only does this cause enormous stress for older people and their whānau, it places additional pressure on the health system which affects emergency and planned care.”

In around a decade, older people will comprise 20% of the population, which means more New Zealanders living with chronic conditions and high health needs.

Older people need a continuum of care to meet their changing needs as they age. These services need to be provided when and where they are needed. This might include at home, with the support of primary and community care, or in residential or respite care.

Providing a continuum of care is underpinned by the need for a sustainable workforce with the specialist training required to care for a diverse population of older people.

“We need a clearly coordinated strategy and action plan to meet these needs. Health reforms need to consider the requirements of older people and recognise and value primary and community care and aged residential care as critical partners in delivering a continuum of care.”

“It’s encouraging to see that Te Whatu Ora is undertaking an aged care funding and service models review with the aim of improving the sustainability of services and ensuring equity of access and outcomes,” says Ms Cooper.

The report’s key recommendations include:

- For workforce planning by Te Whatu Ora to include actions that contribute to a sustainable aged care workforce
- Supporting and monitoring actions outlined in the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan
- Valuing primary and community care, especially GP clinics, as critical partners with priority investment in changing models of primary and community care

Ms Cooper will advocate for the changes in the health and disability services identified in her report and monitor actions taken in response to the recommendations by continuing to connect with older people, their whanau and the providers who care for them.

To arrange an interview with Carolyn Cooper contact: Sarah Evans 027 432 6709 | communications@hdc.org.nz