



Media release from the General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand

Waikanae closure another symptom of funding debacle, urgent cure needed

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The closure of a satellite medical practice at Waikanae Beach is the latest symptom of a growing crisis in primary healthcare caused by years of inadequate funding.

“Waikanae Beach patients, many of whom are elderly and high needs, will now have to travel much further to access medical help at Waikanae Health. This puts more even pressure on this health provider,” said Angus Chambers, Chair of the General Practice Owners Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (GenPro).

“In addition to closing its satellite practice, Waikanae Health also says it has stopped taking on new patients, withdrawn from delivering care at four rest homes, and quit almost all out-of-hours and home consultations. All would have been difficult decisions for the owners of the practice.

“The biggest concern is the impact on patients. But it’s also sad that this, and other closures and reductions in services, elicit no response from the government or Te Whatu Ora, which seem resigned to the gradual erosion of primary healthcare”.

“The state is disinterested in these closures and appears to expect general practice care to be replaced by pharmacies and telehealth, as they are cheaper options. Government is either unconcerned or ignorant to the fact that outcomes will suffer and cost more in the long term,” Dr Chambers said.

General practices are in crisis due to years of under-funding by government and are constrained by out-of-date rules which limit patient charges. They’re also struggling with higher costs, greater patient need, and shortages of medical professionals.

The pressures facing general practices are well documented. Barely a month goes by without a general practice closing, ceasing patient enrolments, or reducing services such as after-hours care.

“Waikanae’s issues are also reflective of the national trend for hospitals to push more and more patients back to GPs, and the impact of changes in eligibility for Community Services Cards that disadvantaged some practices with a high proportion of card holders with high health needs, such as Waikanae.

“The result of this cocktail of problems is that practices are struggling to stay afloat and retain and recruit GPs, meaning long days and staff burn out. Early retirement, reduction in services and, as we regrettably see again today, practice closures are logical consequences. “

The government must as a matter of urgency increase its support of primary healthcare, overhaul the current out-of-date funding model, and help increase the supply of medical professionals into primary healthcare,” said Dr Chambers.



GenPro, which represents about half of all general practices in Aotearoa, is ready to work with the Minister of Health and the Health NZ Commissioner to develop the solutions needed.

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