



Media Release from General Practice Owners Association (GenPro)

August 21, 2024

Tairāwhiti primary care crisis ‘the canary in the coal mine’

The crisis in Tairāwhiti primary healthcare is another warning of the looming collapse of primary healthcare in New Zealand unless drastic action is taken, says Dr Angus Chambers, Chair of the General Practice Owners Association (GenPro).

The significant problems in Tairāwhiti were laid bare by Dr Hiria Nielsen, a managing partner of Three Rivers Medical in Gisborne, on Radio New Zealand’s [Nine to Noon](#) today.

Three Rivers, Tairāwhiti largest practice with 20,000 patients, is closing its books to new patients and no longer opening on weekends and public holidays.

“The issues in Tairāwhiti are being seen in other parts of New Zealand, meaning communities are losing their access to general, injury and mental healthcare.”

Dr Chambers said general practice had absorbed decades of underfunding and worked under a flawed funding model, both of which contributed to chronic shortages in specialist GPs and other medical professionals.

GenPro member Three Rivers’ closure of its face-to-face after-hours service comes on top of other after-hours services, including in Auckland and Christchurch, stopping or reducing their services.

“The drip is turning to a trickle which threatens to become a torrent.”

“Urgent care, the most expensive service to deliver, and most difficult to staff, is therefore the canary in the coal mine, and signals the beginning of wider service closures,” he says.

“Health Minister Shane Reti has acknowledged the problems in primary healthcare and says that solutions are on the way, but we cannot wait until the Budget in May next year for a solution. That is too late,” Dr Chambers says.

“The government must as a matter of urgency increase its support of primary healthcare, overhaul the current out of date funding model, and help increase the supply of medical professionals to primary healthcare,” Dr Chambers says.

GenPro represents more than half of all general practices and over 2.5 million patients in New Zealand. It has nationwide reach combined with clinical expertise and its members are ready to work with the Minister and Commissioner of Health to develop the solutions needed.

Dr Angus Chambers, 027 658 5143