



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

'Get ready for Flying Doctors' - Fast-track Aussie approval increases urgency for NZ funding fix

October 18, 2024

New Zealand needs to properly fund general practice or it will lose even more doctors to Australia.

From October 21, Australia is introducing a new fast-track process which means an expedited pathway for general practitioners to work across the ditch.

"The fast-track process means a GP who qualified as a fellow of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners after 2012 is deemed to have a similar qualification to that in Australia, which means they will see patients sooner. Get ready for Flying Doctors," said Angus Chambers, Chair of the General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand.

New Zealand is already struggling to retain doctors in New Zealand and recruit from overseas, Dr Chambers said.

"According to OECD data, New Zealand has about 3.62 doctors per 1,000 people, well behind Australia's 5.48. The fast-track process will make that worse."

And according to Te Whatu Ora, New Zealand is 485 GPs short, with this number expected to grow to a shortage of between 753 and 1043 doctors in the next 10 years.

Years of underfunding general practices and limits on increasing patient charges have resulted in many practices closing, reducing their services, or not taking on new patients. Financial stresses and greater patient need have resulted in many GPs retiring or moving overseas, adding pressure to already under-resourced practices.

"Australia's doctor shortage is less severe than New Zealand's, but the Australian government has in less than a year made speedy changes to its approval process and other reforms.

By comparison the New Zealand government and Te Whatu Ora seem resigned to the gutting of general practice, and instead want to boost tele-health, pharmacy, and nurse-led care. While these have a place, patient care is optimised in a face-to-face visit with a local GP," Dr Chambers said.

"If we are to retain our existing GP work force and grow the numbers entering the profession in Aotearoa, we need to be able to match the terms and conditions offered by Australian practices. We need the opportunities here to be attractive and competitive compared to Australia and beyond if we want to have a general practice service in future.

"We also need to stem the flow of GPs out of New Zealand general practice. They are already pouring out with retirements, often at earlier ages than in the past, going to secondary care, or leaving New Zealand for jobs offshore, especially Australia."



"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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