

Media Release: Wednesday 19 August 2020

The Government's COVID response plan is at risk

As New Zealanders prepare to vote in the forthcoming general election, the country's first line of defence against further COVID outbreaks is being insulted and ignored by the Government and its District Health Boards (DHBs). That's according to GenPro, the General Practice Owners Association, whose objectives include improving the health of the population and advocating for high quality, accessible and equitable patient care.



Primary health care nurses have voted to strike on 3 September 2020 because there has been no resolution to the nurses' claims for pay parity alongside their hospital based colleagues. The Chair of GenPro, Dr Tim Malloy (pictured), is disappointed that this industrial action appears to target employers and continuity of patient care, including the vital front-line COVID response, "whilst those with the power to resolve this significant pay inequity sit back and do nothing", he said. "It's no surprise whatsoever that this pay offer has been rejected. Why should we expect a well-qualified and experienced nurse to work in primary care for typically 10% less pay than their District Health Board counterparts? This inequity is simply insulting to our nurses and the vital front-line service they are directly providing for our communities."

Dr Malloy claims that one of the reasons for the impasse is because the contractual and funding framework within which General Practices operate is broken, "General Practice owners are totally constrained by a system which caps the fees they can charge at the same time as failing to appropriately recognise rising labour costs in the annual increase of capitation funding from DHBs and the Government - therefore rising costs put the squeeze on the already fragile viability of essential front-line patient care. Health funding bodies need to take note of the inequity and vulnerability they have created in the system and front-up with the funding to address it".

As a newly established representative association GenPro has not been directly involved in contractual negotiations to date, but with the significant impact that such negotiations have on each and every general practice business owner, Dr Malloy says that the process has to change "...and GenPro is keen to work in collaboration with the Government to ensure that future generations can rely on the availability of a sustainable, viable and high quality general practice service."

GenPro continues to reiterate its message, underpinned by its discussion document issued on 31 July 2020, that it is time to change the underpinning principles and formulae that drive separate funding discussions across the health system – discussions which simply do not match the rhetoric of supporting a primary care sector that has also faced increased costs as the first line of attack against COVID-19 and is deemed a priority in letters of ministerial expectations.

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Further information can be obtained from:

Philip Grant, Interim Chief Executive – philip@genpro.org.nz Telephone 022 131 8393
www.genpro.org.nz

GenPro's discussion document entitled *Sustainable and viable General Practice healthcare for our next generation of New Zealanders* is available for download and feedback from its website
<http://genpro.org.nz/docs/consultation31-july-2020.pdf>