



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

GPs frustrated by funding model which restricts patient access, increases deaths from lung cancer

September 28, 2024

An urgent need to increase patients' access to general practice is the clear message from new research on New Zealand's single biggest cause of cancer deaths, lung cancer.

[A study](#) published in the New Zealand Medical Journal found that surviving lung cancer in New Zealand could depend on access to a GP.

"The research clearly shows that patients who are diagnosed with lung cancer after a GP referral tend to have better outcomes than those diagnosed after visiting emergency departments, by which time it's often too late," said Dr Angus Chambers, Chair of the General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (GenPro).

"The study shows that there is health inequity in New Zealand – those who can access and afford to visit a GP are advantaged over those who cannot, which is wrong. We need to ensure everyone can access a GP for an earlier diagnosis which could save lives," Dr Chambers said.

While an emergency department is an important part of the healthcare system, especially for red-flag symptoms, visiting a GP when symptoms are less severe can lead to an earlier diagnosis and therefore better treatment options.

"That patients are choosing not to go to their GP because they cannot get an appointment, cannot enrol in a local GP, or cannot afford to pay for a visit, means they put up with less serious symptoms. But eventually the symptoms get so bad they go to an emergency department. By this time it is often too late."

GPs are at the coalface of early detection of highly fatal diseases like lung cancer, and are frustrated by an outdated funding system which is not helping patients access GPs for early diagnosis and optimal outcomes.

"A recent GenPro survey showed general practices are in crisis, squeezed by rising costs, high patient demand and staff shortages. The key reason is that government funding has not kept pace with the cost of running a general practice," Dr Chambers said.

This is a result of Ministers, the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora refusing to invest in general practice despite overwhelming evidence of the health benefits to New Zealanders.

"The government must as a matter of urgency increase its support of primary healthcare, overhaul the current out-of-date funding model, and help increase the supply of medical professionals into primary healthcare."



GenPro, which represents more than 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.

For more information: Dr Angus Chambers, Chair of GenPro 027 658 5143