

Media Release: Friday 13 November 2020

Long overdue changes to general practice funding are needed to protect New Zealand's hospitals and emergency departments

The General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (GenPro), the national representative body for contracted providers running general practice and urgent care centres across New Zealand, has today repeated calls for changes to the general practice funding framework to help ease the pressure on hospital emergency departments (ED) which was highlighted in a statement this week by the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS).

GenPro's chair, Dr Tim Malloy, said, "There is widespread agreement that the funding framework for general practice needs updating – in fact, a Government commissioned review by an expert Primary Care Working Group on General Practice Sustainability made 19 recommendations to address this in 2015. Most of those recommendations remain unactioned and are long overdue".

GenPro believes it is well-known that more targeting of government funding is needed to address significant inequities in the current system. For example, an affluent patient enrolled with a Very Low-Cost Access practice (VLCA) still receives an additional government subsidy (paying a maximum fee of \$19.50) whilst high-needs patients may be unable to even afford the capped \$19.50 fee and thus turn to ED for their health needs.

Emphasising that the Government controls the funding framework, Dr Malloy said, "As general practice providers, we have been calling for changes for many years. Despite being private businesses, the Government's contractual framework has completely tied our hands with regards patient fees. The on-going chronic underfunding of general practice has a three-fold impact – it affects health outcomes for our communities and patients, it increases pressure on our hospitals and ED departments and, it undermines the sustainability of our essential general practice providers".



Emphasising the same stance, Dr Angus Chambers (pictured), a GP in Christchurch and deputy chair of GenPro, said, "Accessible, well-funded and sustainable general practice is essential for the efficiency of the whole health system. The pressure that we are seeing in hospitals and EDs across the country is partly a result of an underfunded primary care sector and poorly targeted funding which impacts individual patient's ability to access their GP. It is time for the Government to implement changes to the general practice funding framework which are widely acknowledged as being needed".

ENDS

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The 2015 Report of the Primary Care Working Group on General Practice Sustainability can be accessed on the GenPro website here: <http://genpro.org.nz/other-resources.html>

In July 2020, GenPro issued its own discussion paper regarding the general practice financial framework which can be accessed here: <http://genpro.org.nz/docs/consultation31-july-2020.pdf>