

Media Statement: 18 May 2023

Budget will not prevent the further decline of family doctor services

General Practice owners say today's Budget is insufficient to address the chronic workforce and underfunding issues crippling the sector.

"Sadly, the announcements in today's Budget won't stop people having to wait weeks to see their family doctor or prevent further service cuts," General Practice Owners Association of New Zealand Chair and Wellsford GP Dr Tim Malloy says.

"It also won't help attract more nurses and doctors to work and deliver the essential services that family doctors provide for people living in communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand."

The government has said it will spend an extra \$500 million in the primary and community care sector to support sector stability and to reduce pay disparities over time between hospital and community health sector staff. Dr Malloy says that there is no indication of any additional new funding to address the crisis affecting family doctor services "The removal of the \$5 prescription charge will make not a jot of difference to those who cannot access their family doctor to secure the prescription to start with."

GenPro has been campaigning for greater support for struggling general practices for months and has highlighted key issues needing to be addressed, the most significant being the massive pay gap between Te Whatu Ora-employed nurses and those working in general practice. The pay gap is now up to \$20,000 per year or 27% for senior nurses.

"Today's Budget asks our nurses to wait even longer to get the same pay as similarly qualified hospital nurses. It just isn't fair and shows the government continues to undervalue them. Family doctor services will continue to struggle to retain nurses because we simply can't compete. It means some practices will be unable to deliver a range of essential services, such as chronic disease management and childhood immunisations, as they do not have the nurses available to support these services."

He says a GenPro survey conducted late last year found half of all practices had a current vacancy for a nurse, resulting in those practices missing an average 30% of their required nursing workforce. The situation is expected to have deteriorated this year.

"Our survey found that 55% of family doctor clinics were not taking on new patients, which means many people are unable to access subsidised primary health care services. Another 61% of practices said they had a vacancy for a GP."

Dr Malloy says general practice was no longer an attractive specialisation for young doctors and more needed to be done to address the underlying reasons for this.

Chief Executive Philip Grant says critical investment is required in essential family doctor services to reverse years of underfunding and decline.

"For too many years, general practice has been the front-line of New Zealand's health service, but the 'poor cousin' of the government's funding framework. This has resulted in the increasing exodus of undervalued

GPs and primary care nurses from vital community-based services that our most vulnerable should be able to rely on."

Ends.

Further information can be obtained from:

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Notes for Editors:

The Government's own 2022 review into General Practice funding can be downloaded from the Department of the Prime Minister and cabinet website here:

<https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/proactive-release-future-capitation-funding-approach>

GenPro's publication *On The Brink: Saving New Zealand's family doctor service* can be downloaded here:
<https://www.genpro.org.nz/docs/nov2022onthebrink.pdf>