

Aide-Mémoire

Attendance at Big Gay Out 2024

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| Date due to MO: | 16 February 2024 | Action required by: | N/A |
| Security level: | IN CONFIDENCE | Health Report number: | H2024036193 |
| To: | Hon Matt Doocey, Associate Minister of Health | | |
| Consulted: | Health New Zealand: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Māori Health Authority: <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Contact for telephone discussion

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Date due: 16 February 2024

To: Hon Matt Doocey, Associate Minister of Health

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Health Report number:** H2024036193

Details of event: Sunday, 18 February 2024
Coyle Park, Point Chevalier, Auckland
Event time: 12pm – 7pm
Political panel: 1:50pm – 1:55pm
Event hosted by Burnett Foundation Aotearoa

Purpose: You have been asked to participate in a political panel at Big Gay Out, and speak to the Government’s commitment to supporting the health of rainbow and takatāpui communities in New Zealand. This includes implementing the HIV Action Plan and reducing HIV related stigma and discrimination.

Comment:

- This aide-mémoire provides the following to support your attendance at Big Gay Out:
 - background to the event
 - overview of the HIV Action Plan to support your participation on the political panel
 - responses to 3 questions you have received in advance
 - some specific Q&As on 3 issues you may get asked about.
- Also attached to this aide-mémoire is the 9 February 2024 briefing, *Overview of rainbow health to support attendance at Big Gay Out 2024* (H2024034839) which provides an overview of work underway in different rainbow health areas, and some more general talking points.

Background on Big Gay Out

- Big Gay Out is an annual event organised by the Burnett Foundation Aotearoa as part of the Auckland Pride Festival.
- The purpose of this event is to be an inclusive public celebration of New Zealand’s rainbow community.

- Community groups and organisations will be present at the event, and Auckland Sexual Health Service will be onsite to provide free HIV and STI testing.

Burnett Foundation Aotearoa

- The Burnett Foundation Aotearoa (the Foundation), formerly the New Zealand AIDS Foundation, was established in the 1980s in response to the AIDS epidemic and has remained a key organisation focused on community response to HIV in New Zealand. Their work is focused on leadership, education, and support for people living with or affected by HIV.
- The Foundation receives funding from Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora to deliver HIV preventative services including, but not limited to, community HIV testing, promotion of the uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and peer-based support.

Overview of HIV Action Plan to support political panel participation

- The National HIV Action Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand 2023-2030 (the HIV Action Plan) was launched at Big Gay Out in February 2023, and published in March 2023.
- The aim of the HIV Action Plan is to eliminate HIV transmission in New Zealand and ensure that people living with HIV have healthy lives, free from stigma and discrimination. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender and non-binary people are among the priority groups of the HIV Action Plan¹.
- To support implementation of the HIV Action Plan, Budget 2022 allocated \$18 million of dedicated funding over 4 years. This funding was additional to existing spend for HIV prevention and treatment.
- Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora is leading implementation of the HIV Action Plan with contribution from the Māori Health Authority | Te Aka Whai Ora and the Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora.
- The briefing in Appendix 1, *Overview of rainbow health to support attendance at Big Gay Out 2024* (H2024034839), provides more information on other rainbow health areas including:
 - the Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infection (STBBI) Strategy
 - funding and eligibility for PrEP
 - Mpox outbreak and prevention

¹ Other priority groups include people living with HIV, Māori at risk of and living with HIV, people who inject drugs, sex workers, and people who have migrated from high HIV prevalence countries.

- transgender healthcare including gender-affirming genital surgery
- services for people with innate variations in sex characteristic
- rainbow mental health.
- This aide-mémoire discloses all relevant information.



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Talking points for attendance at Big Gay Out 2024

Response to political panel questions

We understand that you have been asked to participate in a political panel at Big Gay Out 2024 along with representatives from other political parties. Speakers will each have 5 minutes on stage. You have been asked to respond to 3 questions. Advice from the organisers of the event noted there will be no discussion deviating from the questions to ensure the communities can learn about the issues that affect their health and wellbeing.

Question 1

Last year at the Big Gay Out, you committed to ongoing funding and implementation for the HIV Action Plan, which is necessary for New Zealand to make HIV History. Now that you are in Government, will you maintain this commitment and how will you support further implementation of the HIV Action Plan?

Suggested response

- Implementation of the HIV Action Plan is well underway since it was launched at this event last year.
- I can assure you this Government remains committed to putting this plan into action to achieve elimination of HIV transmission and ensure people living with HIV have healthy lives free from stigma and discrimination.
- An early focus of the action plan has been on expanding peer-led programmes and resources that focus on connecting and empowering people living with HIV.
- Our upcoming priorities under the plan include increasing contact tracing capability and capacity to work with people newly diagnosed with HIV. We are supporting funding over the next 3 years to create new sexual health clinician leadership roles. These new leaders will work across different regions to enhance HIV responsiveness and support better outcomes for people living with HIV.

Question 2

People living with HIV with an undetectable viral load have zero chance of passing HIV on through sexual transmission, yet they continue facing high levels of stigma and discrimination. What will your government do to bring awareness to this message?

Suggested response

- I understand that despite great advances in treatment and clinical outcomes for people living with HIV, stigma, and discrimination remain common experiences negatively affecting the quality of life for people living with HIV.
- A core goal of the HIV Action Plan is to decrease experiences of stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV in New Zealand. As an initial step to achieve this goal, is a social media campaign to challenge the stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV. Work on this campaign is underway now.

Question 3

How is your government going to support the health of rainbow and takatāpui communities?

Suggested response

- New Zealand has made a lot of progress on how we support rainbow and takatāpui communities. But I acknowledge there is still more work to be done.
- I believe our health system has an important role to play in supporting and responding to the health needs of rainbow communities and ensuring health services work for the people that need them.
- This Government is committed to supporting good health for rainbow and takatāpui communities, and work is already underway to improve support.
- I understand that transgender and non-binary people are often overrepresented in poor health outcomes. This is partly due to discrimination across wider society, but also from within the health system.
- We are continuing to take steps to improve access to primary care for transgender and non-binary people. We are updating guidelines to provide medical practitioners and community members with evidence-based information on gender-affirming care. We are developing training programmes for the primary and community care workforce to support them to deliver safe and appropriate care for transgender people.
- I also want to acknowledge that rainbow communities, particularly young people in those communities, have worse mental health outcomes than many other New Zealanders. That is why this Government is committed to delivering mental health services that work for young people, including young people in rainbow communities.
- The Access and Choice programme provides free community mental health and addiction services across the country. Part of this programme has included a funded package for primary mental health and addiction services for rainbow young people. There is also additional funding for rainbow competency training for the mental health and addiction workforces.

Reactive Q & As

Can you provide an update on the puberty blocker evidence review by Manatū Hauora?

- The Ministry of Health is currently working on an evidence brief. This will examine the scientific evidence regarding the safety, reversibility and long-term clinical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes of puberty blockers in adolescents with gender dysphoria.
- The Ministry of Health is being careful to take adequate time to provide best quality up to date information and to ensure the findings are well communicated to health professionals treating young people with puberty blockers.
- While this evidence brief is underway, puberty blockers continue to be available through prescribing clinicians for those who need them.
- I would like to reiterate the Ministry of Health's advice that decisions on the use of puberty blockers are best made by patients and their families in consultation with appropriate clinicians.

When will we hear from the Ministry of Health on their Evidence Brief for Puberty Blockers?

- The Ministry of Health advises me that it plans to release the Evidence Brief by the end of this month.

What's your position on puberty blockers?

- I expect the Ministry's work to inform the discussion on the use of gender affirming care and subsequently the guidance for clinicians who work in this space. There is a lot of work underway in jurisdictions overseas which should inform this work.
- Ultimately health agencies have a duty of care for all tamariki in New Zealand, including those experiencing gender incongruence.

Are you satisfied with the progress MOH is making on their evidence brief? They keep delaying the release.

- I appreciate the keen interest many groups in New Zealand have in this work. I don't think it is something that should be rushed. I'm aware that Health NZ is also doing a much broader set of work developing guidelines for clinicians who work in this space.

There are over 400 people on the wait-list for gender affirming surgery. What is the Government doing to support people to access gender affirming care?

- Gender affirming care is important to enable people to fully express their identity, and I acknowledge that work needs to be done to make this more available and accessible.
- I am advised that the guidelines for medical practitioners on gender-affirming care are currently being updated, to ensure that these are based on the most up-to-date evidence. The updated guidelines will support medical practitioners who want to learn to prescribe gender-affirming hormone therapy.
- New training programmes for the primary and community care workforce are also in development to support the delivery of safe and appropriate care for transgender people.
- Work has already begun to implement community models of care in Auckland, Canterbury, and the West Coast, and I understand that the procurement process is underway to implement these models of care for additional providers.
- Regarding gender-affirming surgery, it's going to take time to develop the capability and capacity of the health workforce to deliver this service in New Zealand. However, the service provider is currently reviewing the referral, pre-surgical, and post-surgical pathways to remove barriers and to provide patients with greater wrap-around support and access to the service.

What is the rationale for banning monogamous gay couples who have only had sex with each other for the last 3 months from donating blood?

- I understand that blood products are technically regarded as medicines. Given that people who need to be given blood are in a medically vulnerable position, the New Zealand Blood Service (NZBS) has a primary duty of care to ensure that its blood service policy does not result in an increased risk of infection for these people. It is also important that NZBS upholds the ethical rights of potential donors, particularly the right to non-discrimination.
- Although donated blood is thoroughly tested for dangerous viruses, I understand that some viruses like HIV cannot always be detected in the early stages of infection. In these cases, the

virus could then be passed on undetected to a patient needing a blood transfusion, leading to an infection with the virus. As this is a serious risk, NZBS must be sure that any donated blood does not carry an infection.

- I am advised that NZBS' blood donation criteria are evaluated against international best practice and approved by Medsafe before they are put in place. When the current three-month deferral period was approved by Medsafe it aligned with policies already introduced, or in the process of being implemented, in other major blood services.

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Appendix 1

**Briefing - Overview of rainbow health to support attendance at Big Gay Out 2024
(H2024034839)**

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