



11 APR 2024

Ms Rae Lamb
Chair
Health Quality and Safety Commission | Te Tāhū Hauora

Tēnā koe Rae

Delivering timely access to quality health care

As Minister of Health and your shareholding Minister, this letter sets out my expectations for the Health Quality and Safety Commission | Te Tāhū Hauora (HQSC) for the remainder of 2023/24 and 2024/25.

I want to thank you for your commitment over the past year to delivering your agreed objectives during a period of significant change in the health system.

The work carried out by HQSC plays a crucial role in achieving our collective goals for a healthier and more resilient society.

Financial management expectations

We are operating in a difficult fiscal and economic environment locally and internationally and we expect these conditions to be present in the longer term. We are committed to ensuring that the wider public service and the health system work well for New Zealanders.

Your continued focus on delivering your statutory objectives will be crucial, and this needs to be undertaken in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner. As health resources will continue to be finite, it will be important to identify and pursue any opportunities to work collaboratively and collectively with other entities where this will result in health gains or enable efficiencies.

My priorities

The health system is in crisis, despite the ongoing commitment from frontline clinicians. Across various metrics, including access and timeliness, the system is performing poorly and has deteriorated over recent years. My overarching vision for health is ensuring timely access to quality health care. I want to achieve good outcomes for all New Zealanders, with a focus on those with highest need as a key criterion.

The Government Policy Statement on Health is the primary direction setting vehicle for our system and will set out more detail for Government priorities for the next three years.

I expect the health system will focus on improvement in three priority areas related to health services which are access, timeliness and quality. The health system will also focus on three priority areas to make improvements to critical enablers; workforce, targets and infrastructure.

Health targets

The Government is reinstating health targets, and you will be aware that we have recently announced five health targets for the system that will be in place from 1 July 2024. The aim of the health targets is to lift performance across priority areas, provide a focus for effort and resource and to support all parts of the system to move together to achieve our health system goals. The Minister for Mental Health is also setting five targets for mental health and addiction which will be communicated shortly. The annual performance expectations and milestones against the targets will be set in the Government Policy Statement on Health for 2024-2027.

HQSC has longstanding expertise in this area, and I expect you to play an important role in supporting the design of how targets are implemented. This should include working with the Ministry of Health | Manatu Hauora (the Ministry) and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) to roll out the approach to monitoring targets and wider performance and support the development of Health New Zealand's own related internal performance framework.

Governance

Strong governance of your entity will be essential in leading your agency in this environment. I ask that you continue to ensure that your executive staff are providing the right information to enable the Board to make the right strategic decisions, and to undertake assessment and learning activities to improve the performance of your Board members in their important role.

Accountability

I expect that your reporting, and the associated monitoring undertaken by the Ministry, will enable me to assess both the performance of your entity and how you are contributing to overall system performance.

Specific expectations for the Health Quality and Safety Commission

I encourage you to prioritise your efforts and resources in areas where HQSC can add the most value to our collective understanding, while ensuring you remain within your financial parameters. This might mean you prioritise your work programme to focus on areas where you can achieve the most gain, as well as avoiding duplication of work undertaken by other entities.

I ask that you continue to work collaboratively and collectively with other entities as appropriate in all areas of your work. The National Quality Forum is an example of this. I ask that you continue to drive to improve the National Quality Forum to ensure that quality and safety issues discussed in the Forum are appropriately prioritised, and have clear responsibilities, outcomes and actions. This includes establishing clear links and working relationships with Health New Zealand's clinical networks and clinical governance approach.

I would like to see your work programme have a focus on primary and community care, while also maintaining a presence in other areas such as infection prevention and control

and optimal use of medicines. I would also like to see a System Safety Strategy develop, to build on New Zealand's commitment to minimise avoidable harm in health care and improving patient safety.

As we need to increase our efforts to build the capacity and capability of the health workforce, I ask that you explore opportunities to improve methods of delivery of your education programmes so that we can build capability in quality improvement science.

Thank you for your work to date to support health entities implement the Code of expectations for health entities' engagement with consumer and whānau (the Code). I expect you continue this work to establish and regularly assess entities' compliance with the Code, and to target support where needed to address issues. I also expect HQSC itself to continue to act in accordance with the Code when engaging with consumers and whānau and annually report on how you have given effect to the Code.

HQSC must give effect to the Government Policy Statement on Health, I expect you to engage with Health New Zealand as it develops the New Zealand Health Plan.

I ask you to provide a draft of your Statement of Performance Expectations for 2024/25 to your contact at the Ministry by 30 April 2024. I also ask that you update your current Statement of Intent to demonstrate how your current priorities align with the new priorities of this Government. I ask you to liaise with the Ministry regarding an agreed timeframe for when an updated Statement of Intent can be provided.

Nāku noa, nā



Hon Dr Shane Reti
Minister of Health

cc Dr Diana Sarfati, Director-General of Health
Dr Peter Jansen, Chief Executive, Health Quality and Safety Commission