

# **Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care**

## **Apology from the Chief Executive**

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November 2024

Tēnā koutou katoa.

Ko Diana Sarfati ahau. I am Dr Diana Sarfati, Director-General of Health.

### **Introduction**

I stand before you with a profound sense of responsibility and sorrow. Please let me begin with my apology to all of you who were harmed by the abuse that occurred while you were in the care of the state.

### **Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care**

The findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry's report into Abuse in Care reveal the failures of the health system - and those in charge of it - to protect and care for you.

We did not have systems in place to report abuse and neglect or to keep you safe. We failed to listen and act when you did tell us about abuse.

As children, young people and adults in our care, you were harmed by unimaginable abuse and neglect. None of this could be justified then, and it certainly cannot be justified now.

You were denied basic care, dignity and privacy. Sexual, physical, medical and emotional abuse occurred in health settings. In disability and mental health institutions, abortion, sterilisation, and contraception were provided without consent. Seclusion and restraint were used inappropriately and as a means to contain, control, and punish behaviour.

Many of you experienced multiple types of abuse. In some instances this so-called treatment was so abhorrent that the United Nations and the Government have recognised it as torture. This abuse was perpetrated by people in positions of authority that survivors should have been able to trust including carers and health workers.

Racism, ableism and stigma led to practices that affected Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, tāngata whaikaha, Deaf people, Turi Māori and people with mental health conditions.

## **Apology from the Chief Executive**

To survivors, I offer you my deepest apology.

I am sorry for the pain and trauma that you, your families and communities experienced. I acknowledge the lasting impact this has had on your physical, mental, spiritual and cultural wellbeing.

I also acknowledge in this moment those who died in care or by suicide after care.

I recognise that no apology can change the past or make up for the trauma you have suffered. I want to make sure we have the systems in place to ensure this does not happen again.

## **Improving the health system**

The health system has moved away from state residential care or custody for treatment to community-based care options.

We have introduced new standards and models of care that aim to prevent the neglect and abuse that survivors experienced in the past. But we must do more to improve the health system.

The new Mental Health Bill sets out how we provide compulsory mental health care. The Bill:

- recommends an approach that ensures people's rights are put first
- empowers people to be active decision-makers in their care, and
- provides measures to make sure that compulsory or coercive treatment is minimised.

The Ministry of Health, along with Health New Zealand and other health agencies, will work together with affected communities to make sure the health system continues to improve and provide the care people need.

## **In conclusion**

Finally, I would like to thank survivors for your honesty and your strength.

We must ensure we never forget the lessons from the harm done in the past.



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