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PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH AOTEAROA

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Transgender health: briefing to the incoming Minister of Health

Tēna koe Minister

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Health.

We are writing to share our concerns about the serious health inequities and barriers to healthcare experienced by transgender people in New Zealand, and to request a meeting with you to discuss how we can work together to address these.

About PATHA

The Professional Association for Transgender Health Aotearoa (PATHA) is committed to improving the health of transgender people in Aotearoa. Our vision is that all transgender people have full access to appropriate healthcare, and that all healthcare providers have access to information and resources which enable them to provide appropriate healthcare.

We are an interdisciplinary professional organisation working to promote the health, wellbeing, and rights of transgender people. We have more than 100 members, who work professionally for transgender health in clinical, academic, community, legal and other settings.

About transgender health

Around 1% of people in New Zealand are transgender – that is, their current sex or gender is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender people are part of every other population group - every age, ethnicity and cultural background, geographical location and socioeconomic status - while also being their own marginalised population group that has specific health needs.

Transgender people in New Zealand experience serious health inequities, including significantly higher rates of mental distress. For example, the University of Waikato's *Counting Ourselves* survey found 71% of transgender people were currently experiencing high levels of psychological distress (compared with 8% in the general population). *Youth'12* found one in five transgender students had attempted suicide. Nearly half had self-harmed in the previous year.

These inequities are linked to stigma, marginalisation, discrimination and inadequate access to gender-affirming healthcare. Demand for gender-affirming healthcare is increasing, and national leadership is needed to improve access.

Additionally, transgender people face barriers to accessing services across the whole healthcare system because of limited workforce training and systems that are not designed to be inclusive. These equity issues have long been under-recognised in New Zealand's public health system.

Priorities for action to improve transgender health

While these issues have long been recognised, there is currently no targeted national approach to ensure health equity for transgender people. In the attached briefing paper, we outline 10 key recommendations for action across three priority areas. Our recommendations are:

1. A national strategy on transgender health, which aims to improve access to gender-affirming healthcare, ensure the wider healthcare system is trans-competent, and includes a targeted approach to reducing discrimination and recognising gender diversity.

Reliable public access to gender-affirming healthcare

2. National leadership and clear responsibilities to ensure equitable access to gender-affirming healthcare for all transgender people.
3. Clear requirements for DHBs to provide and fund local gender-affirming healthcare services, including through primary care.
4. Adequate funding and support for the national gender-affirming genital surgery service.

A wider health system that delivers safe, equitable, effective care for transgender people

5. DHBs to be resourced and required to include training on providing respectful, non-discriminatory care to transgender people.
6. A national review of health systems and service design, to identify opportunities for national and local systems, environments and policies to be more inclusive.
7. Targeted quality improvement programmes to shift practice and systems.

A targeted approach to addressing discrimination against transgender people as a social determinant of health

8. Commitment to a programme of cross-government action on addressing discrimination and improving transgender health outcomes.
9. A national initiative to reduce discrimination against transgender people.
10. A programme of law reform to address gaps in legal protections for transgender people.

Our attached briefing paper provides more detail on these priority areas and recommendations.

We are available to discuss any aspect of this briefing, or to provide further information. We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these priorities, and how we can work with you to develop a more equitable health system.

Nāku, nā,

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PATHA President

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