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Campaign urges patients to protest funding shortfall leading to fee hikes



Fiona Cassie

fcassie@nzdoctor.co.nz

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A ProCare campaign urges patients to write to health minister Shane Reti and their local MP to express dismay at general practice fee increases [Image: NZD]

Patients facing a jump in GP fees due to government underfunding are encouraged to write to health minister Shane Reti in a campaign launched this week by ProCare.

The PHO's initiative follows the Government telling general practices they can raise their fees higher than usual to compensate for this year's 4 per cent capitation increase, which falls far short of cost pressures. The funding increase for 2024-2025 was widely condemned as **expecting patients to bear the brunt of chronic sector underfunding** during a cost-of-living crisis.

ProCare's Patient Voice campaign includes a flyer for patients saying practices had no choice but to increase fees after multiple warnings to the Government about the impact of underfunding were "disregarded".

"We strongly encourage you to write to the Minister of Health, Dr Shane Reti, along with your local MP expressing your dismay at the increase in fees and outlining the impact the increase will have on you and your whānau," the flyer concludes.

ProCare has sent the flyer, and two sample letters patients can send to politicians, to PHOs nationwide to share with practices.

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Fees rising steeply

From July, practices have been able to raise patient fees by an average of 7.66 per cent without facing fees review committees.

A quick survey by *New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* in early July found fee increases of between 7 and 16 per cent and new adult patient fees of up to \$70 and \$75 at some large urban practices.

Bindi Norwell, ProCare chief executive, told *Stuff* yesterday that the campaign wanted to ensure that patients knew that GPs were “caught between a rock and a hard place”.

One of the sample letters to the health minister says: “By raising general practice fees, many individuals and whānau, particularly those on fixed or lower incomes, are now going to find it increasingly hard to afford to go to their doctor. This is highly likely to lead to longer wait times at hospitals, and mean people leave it until the last minute to seek help when they are unwell.”

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