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GPs virtually invisible in Budget – Sam Murton



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RNZCGP president Sam Murton says general practice is virtually invisible in Budget 2022 documents

News and reaction to Budget 2022

General practice and GPs are virtually invisible in Budget 2022, as is increasingly the case in government discourse about healthcare, says RNZCGP president Sam Murton.

Dr Murton says that apart from the \$86 million of new funding over four years to allow general practices in high-needs areas to open for longer hours and offer more appointments – which is a welcome boost – there seems to be little mention of GPs in Budget documents published today.

She notes that health minister Andrew Little's media release outlining spending plans for \$76 million over four years on primary care health workforce development mentions training in nursing, physiotherapy, pharmacy and optical services – but not GPs.

'It's about allied health services'

Of the \$102 million over three years for more integrated community care, she says, “Once again, it’s about allied health services. I think medical care in the community has been forgotten. I think it just seems to be invisible.

“It’s World Family Doctor Day. The theme is, ‘Always there to care’ and in fact we are not always going to be there to care because we are retiring, we aren’t getting new people in, there’s no support for training.

“All these other [allied health] services are extraordinarily helpful and really good, but medical treatment in the community saves hospitals enormous amounts of money, saves the health system enormous amounts of money and also means that the voting public gets really good healthcare close to home.

“That just gets lost, based on I don’t know what the agenda is. It seems to be that the general practitioner specialist who does a really good job of diagnosing people in the community and treating them the way they need to be treated, and trying to keep them out of hospital, that work is not visible for some reason.”

Infrastructure and new agencies

In a media release, the college says the Budget puts the bulk of new health funding into infrastructure and standing up Health New Zealand and the Māori

Health Authority. The college welcomes the investment for general practitioners in high-need areas, and the investment for community healthcare, but is disappointed that the funding does not specifically address the workforce shortage.

Dr Murton says in the release: “Setting up these new entities is important but so is addressing the significant specialist general practitioner workforce issues.

“As more GPs are nearing retirement age or thinking of leaving the profession early due to burnout, there will be no ability to provide more consultations and longer opening hours, let alone train the new generation of general practitioners who are coming through our training programme.

“There needs to be a solid investment in training more general practitioners and rural hospital doctors so we can continue to provide complex medical care in the community, or it is the patients who will miss out.”

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