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Proposed funding lift will 'threaten services': General practice leaders



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Wednesday

1 June

2022, 04:57

PM

2 minutes

to Read



General Practice Leaders Forum chair Mark Peterson the offer is “quite frankly, insulting”

General practice leaders have slammed an “insulting” government offer of a 3 per cent increase in capitation funding for the year starting on 1 July.

Talks between representatives of the sector and the Government broke down today.

“The percentage offered was quite frankly insulting, and not enough to maintain general practice services in this country which will disproportionately affect our most vulnerable groups,” General Practice Leaders Forum (GPLF) chair Mark Peterson says in a media release.

The release says 3 per cent is not enough to ensure the sustainability of general practice.

The talks took place at a meeting of the PHO Services Agreement Amendment Protocol (PSAAP) where representatives of contracted providers, PHOs, DHBs and now interim Health New Zealand discuss the funding agreement. It is meant to be a negotiation, but if there is no agreement, the government parties can impose a settlement and have done so in previous years.

The GPLF says it is asking the government representatives to seriously consider their funding offer and bring something to the table that will ensure New Zealanders don't become sicker while waiting for the vital medical services they deserve from their general practitioners.

Capitation not keeping up

Dr Peterson, a specialist GP in Hawke's Bay, says in the release that for several years the annual capitation increase has not kept up with the costs of doing business. The current offer would rapidly accelerate the widening gap between government funding of primary care, and the costs of providing general practice services.

"It is frustrating that the cost of providing care to our patients in the community is not recognised or understood by the Government and their agents. We can't continue to operate in an outdated funding model when we're providing essential care for the majority of New Zealanders," says Dr Peterson.

General Practice New Zealand chair Jeff Lowe says in the release: "General practice continues to be funded in an outdated model that simply does not cater to communities, whānau, and their complex needs."

Outdated funding model

RNZCGP president Sam Murton adds, “We have frequently heard in the media recently from the Minister of Health [Andrew Little] about ‘traditional’ general practice, but the only traditional thing about general practice is the outdated funding model.

“General practice is the delivery of specialist medical care that is based on building trusted relationships. It is complex. It often involves time, listening, and understanding before diagnosis or a treatment plan is formed. It requires a team of professionals working seamlessly together to provide the best possible care for our patients.”

General practice Owners Association chair Tim Malloy says in the release, “General practice in New Zealand is really struggling, our professional teams - specialist GPs, primary care nurses, and allied health staff are burnt out and COVID-19 has shone a very bright light on what was already well known within the sector – that key decision makers do not understand the complexity and importance of general practice and its criticality to healthcare to all New Zealanders.”

The release says general practice is in a crisis that is perpetuated by workforce shortages, excessive workloads causing burnout, and years of under funding and lack of pay parity across both medical and nursing functions.

Dr Peterson says the forum fed back to the funders prior to the meeting that the initial 2.38 per cent proposal, calculated using the controversial Sapere cost pressure formula, “was never going to be enough”.

“They came back with three per cent with an explanation that was the uplift that Health New Zealand will be offering throughout the health sector,” he says.

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