



Hon Andrew Little
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON 6160

Matt Doocey
MP for Waimakariri

25 January 2022

Dear Hon Andrew Little,

I am writing to you in your role as Health Minister to request that you urgently convene a youth mental health summit in response to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth mental health and how to best prepare and respond. The New Zealand Covid-19 youth mental health summit should bring together academics and researchers, mental health professionals, advocates, young people with lived experience, government ministry officials and cross-party political representation.

Australian mental health professionals are calling declining youth mental health a shadow pandemic, the United Kingdom is reporting the inability of youth mental health services to respond to surging waiting times, while in the United States the Surgeon General has warned of the devastating impact of the pandemic on young people.

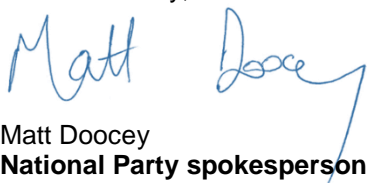
In New Zealand we are seeing early signs of what other countries are already experiencing. Recent research from the University of Auckland confirmed a pandemic related increase in demand for eating disorder services for young people. Recently published data for dispensing of antidepressants by the Ministry of Health during the first year of the pandemic shows a disproportionate increase for younger people compared to other age groups. DHBs are saying the pandemic has driven a surge in demand that they are struggling to meet, which is resulting in young people waiting longer than adults.

The New Zealand Covid-19 youth mental health summit is needed to identify the early signs of mental distress in our young people as a result of the pandemic, establish what further mental distress we may expect to encounter, and then agree on a national action plan to increase access to youth mental health support and reduce waiting times. Youth mental health support should be both the promotion of mental wellbeing and the treatment of mental illness.

We may not be able to stop the pandemic but we can mitigate the mental distress this is having on our young people and ensure they get timely access to the mental health support they need.

I look forward to your response on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Matt Doocey
National Party spokesperson for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Parliament

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Authorised by Matt Doocey, Parliament Buildings, Wellington.

