



5 December 2023

Hon Dr Shane Reti

Via email: [s.reti@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:s.reti@ministers.govt.nz)

Tēnā koe Minister

**Open letter: Disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora**

The NZCPHM has previously supported the establishment and Kaupapa of Te Aka Whai Ora – the Māori Health Authority. This was seen as an important step towards attaining tino rangatiratanga and health equity for Māori.<sup>1</sup>

We are disappointed that the National / Act / New Zealand First Government has chosen to make the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora a priority.

We note Judge Damien Stones letter to Government officials on 18 October 2021 regarding progress on the Wai 2575 Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry where he stated: *the Government's decision to establish a Māori Health Authority in April 2021 was a welcome development and, in fact, goes further than our interim recommendation envisaged. However, it remains unclear which Treaty partner will actually wield the Authority's mandate: tino rangatiratanga demands it must be Māori who control it and to whom it is accountable. Nor are we sure if the Government's reforms will empower Māori to reshape the fundamental paradigm of health care itself, another key theme in our report. The answers will lie in the detailed legislative and policy arrangements that give effect to the reforms. For this reason, in finalising our interim recommendation, we call on the Crown to keep working with Māori to ensure a tino rangatiratanga-compliant health care system is realised in practice (p.xxii).*<sup>2</sup> This call for a tino rangatiratanga-compliant health care system remains relevant.

Our strong view is that Te Aka Whai Ora should not be disestablished. However, if this is to occur, we urge that, in the process of disestablishment, a focus should be retained on ensuring that responsible structures in the health system are held accountable for achieving equity in health outcomes for Māori.

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Health for Everyone | Ō Tātou Hauora. Wellington: NZCPHM, 2023. (<https://nzcphm.org.nz/filescust/NZCPHM%20Health%20For%20Everyone%20FINAL.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Waitangi Tribunal. Hauora: Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry. WAI 2575. Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal, 2019. (<https://waitangitribunal.govt.nz/news/report-on-stage-one-of-health-services-and-outcomes-released/>)

We support the stated intent in the Government's Coalition agreements to ensure that public services are 'prioritised on the basis of need' (under the goal of 'Strengthening democracy').<sup>3</sup> As you will know from many years' worth of data, structural racism in the health system and the determinants of health has resulted in Māori carrying a disproportionate burden of ill health.<sup>4</sup> This inequity persists across a range of demographics such as age, sex and socioeconomic status. That is, Māori experience worse access and receive poorer quality, less safe health care in our public health system, irrespective of their social status.<sup>4</sup> We support the government addressing these persistent, unacceptable inequities for New Zealand citizens.

We have noted that the Coalition agreement further states that the new government will 'uphold the principles of liberal democracy including equal citizenship'.<sup>3</sup> Our College fully supports initiatives which will eliminate the current structural racism against Māori in New Zealand, as this racism results in adverse outcomes across a range of health, social, education and justice indicators.<sup>5</sup>

We note your intent to ensure 'that decision-making and funding in this space can still happen close to home and to hapū'<sup>6</sup> which we support. We would like to see a continued role for Iwi Māori Partnership Boards in the development of locality plans. However, we suggest that local initiatives will be more effective if combined with a strong national Māori voice and leadership in the health system, with power and decision-making authority.

We urge you to continue to support initiatives to grow and strengthen the Hauora Māori workforce, including the Māori public health workforce.

We note further that a strong focus on measures that address the determinants of health will lead to better outcomes for Māori, and for all New Zealanders.<sup>1</sup>

We look forward to working with the Government to protect, improve and promote the health of all New Zealanders, particularly those citizens who are currently underserved.

Nāku, nā



Sir Collin Tukuitonga  
President

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<sup>3</sup> Coalition Agreement New Zealand National Party & ACT New Zealand. Nov 2023. Available from NZ Doctor [https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/sites/default/files/2023-11/National\\_ACT\\_Agreement.pdf](https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/sites/default/files/2023-11/National_ACT_Agreement.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> A Window of the quality of Aotearoa New Zealand's health care 2019 – a view on Māori health equity (HQSC 2019). Available from <https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/resources/resource-library/a-window-on-the-quality-of-aotearoa-new-zealands-health-care-2019-a-view-on-maori-health-equity-2/>

<sup>5</sup> Talamaivao N, Harris R, Cormack D, Paine S-J, King P. Racism and health in Aotearoa New Zealand: a systematic review of quantitative studies. New Zealand Medical Journal. 133:1521, 4 September 2020. (<https://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/racism-and-health-in-aotearoa-new-zealand-a-systematic-review-of-quantitative-studies>)

<sup>6</sup> Hon Dr Shane Reti, quoted <https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/133353628/doctors-urge-new-government-to-retain-te-aka-whai-ora-mori-health-authority>