

For Immediate Release:

New Zealand Psychological Society raises major concerns over proposed Pae Ora changes

The New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPsS), the largest professional body representing psychologists in Aotearoa, is deeply concerned about the proposed amendments to the *Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act*, recently announced by Health Minister Simeon Brown.

“These changes represent a significant regression in the delivery of equitable, culturally responsive healthcare,” said Dr Rebecca Wirihana (President, NZPsS) “They undermine Te Tiriti o Waitangi and are utterly lacking the robust consultative process He Pae Ora was developed to provide - stripping away protections for Māori, disabled, minoritised and oppressed communities and weakening the integrity of our public health system.” The pace and magnitude of these changes, in addition to the lack of open and transparent consultation, is cause for great concern from our profession. Psychologists work largely within highly complex areas of psychosocial need where Te Tiriti based equity measures have had enduring impacts on access to specialist psychological services across multiple levels of care, need and across government sectors.

One of the most troubling proposals is the repeal of Te Mauri o Rongo, the New Zealand Health Charter, which sets out values and expectations for culturally safe care across the health sector. The Charter has provided essential guidance for health professionals, including psychologists, on how to engage respectfully and effectively with tangata whenua and other marginalised groups.

“Te Mauri o Rongo is more than symbolic—it reflects years of collaborative work to embed Te Tiriti principles into everyday practice,” said Dr Rebecca Wirihana “Its removal signals a deliberate move away from partnership, equity, and accountability.”

The Society also opposes the downgrading of Iwi Māori Partnership Boards, which are currently tasked with influencing local health service design. Under the proposed amendments, these Boards would be relegated to a consultative role, without meaningful power to shape outcomes.

“This is a clear breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi,” said Dr Rebecca Wirihana “Psychologists know from practice and research that Māori leadership in health leads to better outcomes for everyone. Removing that leadership undermines community trust and exacerbates health disparities.” Recent repurposing of the Health Research Council (HRC) funding to advancement in technology will further erode the evidence-based research the HRC has contributed too and informed for decades. Again, lack of full consultation regarding these changes breaches Te Tiriti o Waitangi and demoralises health researchers and the contribution they have made to building evidence-based interventions across our wider diaspora.

Further concerns include the reintroduction of rigid health targets, which NZPsS warns will encourage data manipulation and lead to the exclusion of patients with complex needs—including those experiencing mental distress, neurodivergence, or disability. Nick Farrelly (Director for Professional Issues) said “These targets are not accompanied by the resourcing necessary to improve care, and risk further overburdening an already stretched workforce. With the focus of the proposal being on timely service, targets will be focused on seeing as many people as quickly as possible (rather than focusing on how well these people become) prioritizing outputs over outcomes. This will favour short-term interventions, and therefore mild/moderate cases are more likely to be seen and accepted. Severe and complex cases may

be passed around at best, or possibly ignored at worst, as they will impede the focus on achieving targets. This approach does not lean itself towards efficacious psychological work, and psychologists will face the tension of knowing that people who need long-term psychological intervention may only get a short-term fix, if they get seen at all". The recent report from the Auditor General *Providing Equitable Access to Planned Care Treatment* highlighted these inconsistencies in Health New Zealand's reporting methods noting inequitable access to planned care prolonging wait times for Māori, Pacific, rural and low socio-demographic communities. The report reiterated the need for He Pae Ora Act (2022) equity-based measures as a critical framework for reducing systemic barriers impacting access to care across these communities.

The Society is also alarmed by the government's broader signals such as the *Putting Patients First* consultation document, which suggest a move to weaken regulatory standards and reduce requirements for cultural competency in health professions.

"These changes threaten the safety of service users and undermine the credibility of the health workforce," said Dr Rebekah Graham, Director of Professional Development and Training. "Registered psychologists in Aotearoa New Zealand are held to high standards for good reason. These must not be eroded for the sake of convenience or cost-cutting."

The NZPsS urges the Government, and the Health Select Committee to reconsider these amendments and instead work to strengthen the foundations of a just, inclusive, and evidence-based public health system.

"We must uphold our obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, protect cultural safety, and ensure that all people in Aotearoa can access care that is safe, appropriate, and responsive to their needs," said Dr Rebekah Graham.

Press release ends

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For more information:

- *Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022:*
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0030/latest/whole.html>
- *Putting Patients First consultation document:*
<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/putting-patients-first-modernising-health-workforce-regulation-consultation-document>
- *Te Mauri o Rongo (NZ Health Charter):* <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/about-us/who-we-are/health-charter-te-mauri-o-rongo/>
- *Providing Equitable Access to Planned Care Treatment:*
<https://oag.parliament.nz/2025/planned-care/docs/planned-care.pdf>