



The Royal
Australian &
New Zealand
College of
Psychiatrists



Aotearoa New Zealand Election 2023

Creating pathways for impactful mental health care



Tu Te Akaaka Roa, the NZ Office of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) advocates for investment in mental health and related services that support tangata whaiora to live well, stay well and get well.

This involves addressing both the immediate needs of people experiencing mental illness and addiction as well as tackling lasting social determinants of these issues such as poverty, family violence, homelessness, and poor educational achievement.

We applaud recent investment in primary care services which will help meet the needs of people with mild to moderate mental health and addiction needs. But we implore the incoming New Zealand Government to now prioritise supports and services that focus on the acute end of mental health care.



While we are broadly supportive of the initiatives outlined in He Ara Oranga and the Oranga Hinengaro System and Service Framework, focused investment is essential to achieve effective results and realise the vision of pae ora, as set out in the New Zealand Health Strategy, and achieve the strategy's goal of health equity and improved health outcomes for all New Zealanders.

Based on our sound knowledge of the mental health and addiction system, we offer the following recommendations to the incoming Government in advance of the 2023 General Election.



Urgently address our workforce shortage

New Zealanders deserve a psychiatric workforce that provides culturally appropriate, accessible, and effective care, but Aotearoa currently has one of the lowest numbers of practising psychiatrists per capita in the OECD.

Of great concern is the gap between the number of practitioners approaching retirement and those entering the workforce, and New Zealand's reliance on overseas-trained psychiatrists in its workforce – current RANZCP data indicates this is 40% of working psychiatrists.

We ask the incoming Government to address this; more psychiatrists will increase equity, and improve community access to mental health care.

Investment

- ▶ \$60 million investment over six years to support 60 new psychiatry trainees through the system and into practice.

Impact

This investment will boost psychiatry numbers and lift the number of practitioners in our community, ensuring more people will have access to the care they need. A larger workforce will ease staffing pressures, which are contributing to burnout and stress for clinicians and an increasing difficulty in recruitment and retention.

This investment in the workforce will need a clear focus on training Māori and Pacific psychiatrists to better reflect the communities they serve and improve care for Māori and Pacific peoples, who experience persistent and significant inequities in health outcomes.

It will also allow for more child and adolescent psychiatrists to provide the services our tamariki and rangatahi need.

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Remember the 5% with the greatest need

Tu Te Akaaka Roa, the College's New Zealand National Committee, has significant concern for the 5% of people living with severe mental health and addiction problems and are eligible to receive specialist care. This group incurs significant direct and indirect cost to society.

It is recognised that, due to bed shortages, acutely unwell people are either not admitted or are discharged to create space for the next admission, which creates a cycle of crisis-driven reactive care. The lack of beds is self-perpetuating – when people have to wait longer to access treatment, they become more unwell in the interim, and then it takes longer to recover.

Not all committed funding has been spent in these areas. We ask the incoming Government to utilise this funding urgently for the services it was intended to support.

Investment

- ▶ Commit to spending the previously announced mental health budget on mental health services.
- ▶ Increase future mental health budgets by \$7.7 million per year, equating to \$25m over three years, to meet the population growth and rising costs of existing services.

Impact

Using the ring-fenced funding will ensure more New Zealanders, specifically the 5% of the population with severe mental health and addiction needs, can access the specialist mental health services they need.

It will see more inpatient beds for people experiencing severe and/or life-threatening mental health problems and expand funding for housing options for people with long-term mental health and addiction problems. Increasing specialist services will ensure that more support is offered to those in crisis, which, in turn, will help reduce New Zealand's suicide rate.

Increasing and monitoring ring-fenced mental health and addiction funding will:

- ▶ Improve crisis assessment, in-home support, and community respite for people experiencing acute mental distress
- ▶ Increase inpatient beds for people experiencing severe and/or life-threatening mental health problems
- ▶ Provide safe housing options for people with long-term mental health and addiction problems as they recover

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Commit to making evidence-based decisions

Evidence underpins good investment decisions, meaning public finances are spent on the right initiatives. Without relevant data describing the mental health and addiction problems experienced by New Zealanders, it is challenging to quantify and track need, which means Government investment is not necessarily being targeted at the right areas.

Current national mental health survey data is significantly dated, meaning services are not based on actual population need.

Investment

- ▶ \$27 million over three years to provide a comprehensive survey, aimed at understanding the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealanders.
- ▶ Establish a clinical quality registry program to monitor the quality of mental health care.
- ▶ Funding to establish systematic, regular collection of workforce data.

Impact

Collecting relevant data sets, and ensuring data sets are regularly updated, will enable tracking of appropriateness and effectiveness of mental health services, helping the incoming Government to improve efficiency and deliver appropriate return on investment.

The RANZCP believes this can be delivered via a national mental health survey to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealanders, a clinical quality registry program for mental health, and regular collection of workforce data at a national level.





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We tautoko the mahi to address the demand for mental health services in Aotearoa New Zealand and we will partner with the incoming Government to identify and support appropriate pathways in a focused, impactful way.

Key contacts

Dr Hiran Thabrew

Chair, Tu Te Akaaka Roa
Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
New Zealand Office, Wellington
nzoffice@ranzcp.org

Katherine Minett

New Zealand Office
katherine.minett@ranzcp.org

Monique Devereux

Executive Manager, Bi National Offices and Partnerships
monique.devereux@ranzcp.org



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