

15 December 2023

Hon Dr Shane Reti
Minister of Health
By email

Dear Minister

On behalf of Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ) congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Health. We have appreciated the opportunities we have had to discuss issues with you from the Health Select Committee in the previous government. Our new President Kirsten Davie and CEO Sandra Kirby seek an early opportunity to meet with you to discuss how the physiotherapy profession could aid in addressing the challenges of the health system which is under pressure.

Physiotherapyⁱ is currently not routinely funded in primary care, despite the evidence for its effectiveness. An example of this evidence is the Mobility Action Programme (MAP) 2017-2019, which under the last National led government provided strong evidence as an effective early intervention programme in primary care for people with musculoskeletal conditions. The MAP has resulted in health outcome gains for its participants, with the priority population groups achieving similar or better improvements in health statusⁱⁱ. We see this type of intervention that supports non-surgical, non-pharmacological treatments for people with musculoskeletal conditions could support the current government achieving health gains whilst relieving the current pressures in primary care and the well documented delays in people being able to access services.

At a glance here's what our members can offer to support you to achieve better health outcomes:

- Physiotherapy provides immediate benefit at a level of investment at or better than other funding.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Physiotherapy practice is person and whānau centric; increasing individual and whānau empowerment to self-manage their health and wellbeing^{iv}.
- Physiotherapists are a highly skilled, trusted,^v evidenced-based, and regulated workforce.^{vi}
- By assisting General Practitioners workload, with one in four patient visits to a GP best managed by a physiotherapist.^{vii}
- Physiotherapy is a recommended first line treatment for osteoarthritis,^{viii} musculoskeletal conditions, pelvic health conditions, and maintaining health in old age.
- Physiotherapy helps improve health before and after surgery.^{ix}
- Physiotherapy helps recovery from Long Covid,^x cancer treatment,^{xi} and mental health conditions.^{xii}

We have supported the general direction of the health reforms and support the principles from the Simpson Review. The health plans and strategies developed under Pae Ora and Te Whatu Ora outline the importance of and potential for physiotherapy in primary care but there remains no clear pathway for its funding e.g. through Comprehensive Primary and Community Care Teams. The evidence exists that on average a quarter of visits to a GP are for conditions that are effectively managed through physiotherapy such as musculoskeletal conditions, lower back pain and chronic pain. The National Health Service in the United Kingdom utilises physiotherapists as first contact practitioners has proved a successful model for patient and service effectiveness^{xiii}.

We do want to acknowledge the good as well. The rollout of the Orthopaedic Triage programmes across Te Manawa Taki and Te Tai Tokerau as part of the Reset and Restore programme agreed by the previous government is making a difference. Thousands of people who had been waiting for more than 12 months for a first specialist assessment with an orthopaedic surgeon have been able to access evidence-based assessments and treatments from a physiotherapist. The people who have been assessed and referred to secondary care have around a 90% conversion to surgery rate,

compared to around 30% with usual practice^{xiv}. This is a real success story and one we are keen to see delivered nationally.

While it is great to see one programme being implemented, not without its challenges, we believe that the potential for gain is not yet realised as our members are passionate about helping New Zealanders achieve better health outcomes.

PNZ is one of the organisations that signed the open letter to retain the Smokefree Environments Act 2022. For many years PNZ has supported moves to reduce tobacco use and the associated challenges for health and breathing-related disorders. We are happy to include this topic in our meeting with you.

Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ)

PNZ is the national membership organization for physiotherapists, physiotherapy assistants, and students, with 5,000 members encompassing 70% of registered physiotherapists in New Zealand. We support physiotherapists to lead improved health outcomes for Aotearoa, working with and advocating to stakeholders, as well as collaborating with others where our goals and values are aligned.

We are keen to meet with you to share our vision of the way physiotherapy can support the health service. Physiotherapists can and should be an integral part of the solution to easing chronic pain of New Zealanders and easing pressure on our health system. The key contact for Physiotherapy New Zealand is CEO Sandra Kirby on 021 397 169 or sandra.kirby@physiotherapy.org.nz. We will follow up with your office to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely



Kirsten Davie

President

Physiotherapy New Zealand

ⁱ Physiotherapist, physical therapist, along with associated abbreviations, can only be used by persons who are registered, and qualified to be registered, under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance (HPCA) Act (2003); and hold a current annual practicing certificate with the Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand.

ⁱⁱ Allen & Clark Evaluation of MAP Programme Accessed from health.govt.nz. NZIER 2020 Better outcomes through increased access to physiotherapy accessed from <https://www.nzier.org.nz/publications/better-outcomes-through-increased-access-to-physiotherapy>

^{iv} See Person and Whanau Centred Care <https://pnz.org.nz/pwcc>

^v PNZ Public Survey report.

^{vi} Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand Annual Report 2022/23, physioboard.org.nz. The workforce is predominately female (76%).

^{vii} Hidden In Plain Sight, NZIER report to Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand (AHANZ), 2023, alliedhealth.org.nz.

^{viii} Osteoarthritis Summit 2022, arthritis.org.nz

^{ix} Planned care initiatives such as COTS programme in Bay of Plenty demonstrate effectiveness.

^x Time for Govt to put up money on Long Covid, newsroom.co.nz.

^{xi} Brennan et al, 2022. Physical therapists in Oncology Settings, Physical Therapy, 102(3).

^{xii} Firth et al, 2020. Redefining mental healthcare: Going multi-disciplinary to manage multimorbidity. Psychiatry Research, 284.

^{xiii} See <https://firstcontactpractitioner.org.uk/>

^{xiv} Presentation 2023 Aotearoa New Zealand Osteoarthritis Summit November 2023