

14 February 2008

Hon Helen Clark
Prime Minister of New Zealand
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Prime Minister

It was encouraging to hear about your Government's new approach to funding community organisations. Not only is this a significant policy announcement but a very real acknowledgement of the valuable contribution made by community organisations in the critical role often played in front line service delivery.

The decision to provide full funding, regular ongoing increases and move away from the competitive market-based system is welcomed by the sector as a whole. This fresh approach could go a long way to solving the numerous common and systemic issues faced by many mental health, addiction and disability community organisations.

Despite widespread dissemination of key resources like the *Treasury Guidelines for contracting with non government organisations*, web based resources and guidance for public servants produced by Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector, the realisation of the vision of an Improved Community Government relationship as described in the Statement of Government Intentions, that you signed in 2001, has sadly been limited within the mental health, disability and addiction sectors.

We believe it is critical that the funding and poor contracting practices that exist for community organisations contracting in the District Health Board Funding and Disability Support environments are urgently addressed. The community sector has been remarkably tolerant over many years as DHB colleagues learned and practised their role as purchasers. However significant issues, such as high staff turnover and differing levels of competence still remain, as does the ongoing sustainable funding of the community sector.

The pressure on District Health Boards is intense and still largely remains focussed on clinical issues and hospital management. The development of the community sector that delivers a wide range of services constantly takes a back seat. This lack of strategic planning and investment is now evidenced by significant pricing inequities, inability to compete with Public Sector wages

for clinical staff and a plethora of small organisations that are struggling to meet increasing compliance costs.

Community organisations in our sector, want to provide with much more certainty, innovative, responsive and future orientated services. They want to be able to plan ahead and to be able to recruit and retain staff that will deliver better outcomes for all New Zealanders. Many of these issues could be addressed if we were to apply your new model in the social services to the community sector operating within Health.

Platform would truly welcome and support the implementation of such an initiative by your Government, across the mental health, addiction and disability sectors for services that are delivered by community organisations under contract to the Crown.

We look forward to supporting this refreshing approach to strengthening the work of the mental health and addictions sectors.

Yours sincerely

Marion Blake
CEO