

Kia ora koutou

As you may be aware, Health NZ is working with NZ Police and the Ministry of Health, along with Hato Hone St John and Wellington Free Ambulance, to change the way agencies respond to mental health distress.

We would like to provide you with an update on this work from a national perspective. Health NZ staff that you usually liaise with will be able to provide more detail on how these changes are being implemented in their area or region.

At the heart of these changes is ensuring people in mental health distress receive the right care at the right time, and their safety and that of kaimahi delivering that care is paramount. This is why agencies have committed to changing how they respond to mental health distress over a 12-month period. The first of these changes began on 4 November.

Over the past few months, we have been working with Health NZ staff in our mental health services, emergency departments and security teams on planning for these changes, with a focus on the first phase which involves mainly low-risk interactions (more detail is in the graphic below). We have also begun planning for the changes that will start from March 2025.



As with any change of this nature, there have been some initial teething challenges, and we are working with Police locally and nationally to resolve these issues.

Impact on NGOs

We are aware there will be an impact on NGOs and the services you provide during this change process. We are keen to identify any support that you may need, and opportunities where we can collaborate with you on our planning. The programme team overseeing this work has asked Health NZ districts to ensure they are engaging with you on these changes, particularly around acute alternatives, crisis respite and residential services. NGOs have a forum through Platform to liaise with Health NZ on a regular basis to provide input including feedback to the NGO sector.

Staff safety

Police have stressed that they will always respond where there is an offence being committed (that they would normally attend) or an immediate risk to life or safety.

This includes when there is a clear safety concern for a person experiencing mental distress and that serious injury or death may occur, or where there may be concerns of possible violence or criminal actions, or where a person is a serious danger to themselves or others.

Please reiterate to your teams that Health NZ does not expect any kaimahi – working for Health NZ or an NGO – to put themselves at risk or in dangerous situations. We recommend there is shared decision-making – involving support staff, clinician teams, managers, and multidisciplinary teams – to ensure the best decisions are made for all parties. Escalation of risk should occur via your usual process. There will continue to be times when your staff need to call Police for assistance, or they should withdraw to minimise risk of harm.

Health NZ escalation pathways

A joint agency governance group involving Police, Ministry of Health, Hato Hone St John, Wellington Free Ambulance and Health NZ will be in place throughout the year-long change programme to ensure there is an agreed and aligned approach to these changes and manage any issues as they arise.

If you believe Police in your area are not adhering to the agreed timeline of the change programme, or agreed processes and protocols please send details through to MHPoliceChanges@tewhatauora.govt.nz as well as providing this information to your local Health NZ Mental Health and Addictions Team. It's important we have this information so we can raise any issues with Police as soon as possible at a local or national level, as appropriate.

Review of changes

A review of the first phase of the change programme will start in late November and we will involve staff and our stakeholders in this process.

We welcome any feedback from NGOs about how the changes are working and any questions you may have to MHPoliceChanges@tewhatauora.govt.nz.

We will be taking a continuous improvement approach during the programme, to ensure the changes are working as intended and being implemented as smoothly as possible.

Note: Please forward any of this information to your teams as required.

Ngā mihi

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