



- MEDIA RELEASE -

## New Health Strategy Offers Hope for Better Outcomes in Communities

Community mental health and addiction advocacy organisation Platform applauds the changes announced in the refreshed New Zealand Health Strategy.

*“The new Strategy finally recognises the importance of the whole health sector that supports New Zealanders outside of hospitals and GPs’ offices”* observes Platform CEO Marion Blake.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) operating in New Zealand, that receive between \$2-4 billion per year of funding according to the Ministry of Health’s website, have often been shut out of health strategic planning conversations in favour of the perceived ‘professional’ health workforce. The Strategy themes of people-powered, closer to home and one team, and the actions designated under them, are welcomed by the non-government sector.

Marion asserts that *“there is a myth that community organisations are simply well meaning non-professionals doing their best to meet a local need. In fact, many of these organisations are sophisticated businesses, with specialist trained staff, that deliver innovative client-focussed evidence-based services with limited funding.”*

The uncertainty of operating with unpredictable funding contracts creates extra challenges and risks for NGOs such as staff retention, not to mention the difficulties of entering into lease agreements for premises and securing other vital infrastructure. Many of these challenges, also identified and evidenced in the Productivity Commission’s More Effective Social Services report, are acknowledged in the new Strategy with a stated focus on improved purchasing and commissioning of NGO services and 3-5 year contracting also signalled.

Platform welcomes the investment approach and outcomes framework indicated in the Strategy. However, it cautions that social investment is complex and cannot be viewed in the same terms as other economic investment. While prevention and early intervention approaches to health are described in the new Strategy, Platform warns that a situation where only services that represent ‘good investments’ with guaranteed ‘outcomes’ are funded by Government could mean failing the most at risk New Zealanders.

In the meantime, the NGO sector hasn’t waited idly by for the Ministry of Health to lead a one team approach. The health sector has collaborated to create the highly successful Equally Well movement, supported by Platform together with over 40 organisations including the New Zealand Medical Association, General Practice NZ, The Royal College of General Practitioners, the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand Incorporated, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine and a number of PHOs and DHBs. The movement is working to improve the devastatingly poor physical health outcomes for people with experience of mental health and/or addiction issues.

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