



Media Release: 30 August 2023

Family Doctor Services Under Significant Financial Pressure

Nearly 90% of essential family doctor services are concerned about their future financial viability, according to a survey released today.

“The survey paints an incredibly worrying picture of the crisis family doctor services are facing, not only in their financial performance, but also in recruiting and retaining enough doctors and nurses, and in delivering much-needed services,” General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (GenPro) Chair Dr Angus Chambers says.

“We are going to lose our general practice service if we are not careful.”

The GenPro member survey found 35% of general practices made a loss in the last quarter of the financial year and a staggering 88% said they are concerned about the future financial viability of their practice.

“The situation in general practice has worsened significantly in the past year and all New Zealanders are feeling the effects of that,” says Dr Chambers.

“Kiwis are struggling to get an appointment to see their doctor, or they are waiting longer to see their doctor. Worse still, many are ending up in our emergency departments. This is because government funding to family doctor services has not kept pace with inflation or the cost of living, and also fails to recognise the increasing complexity of health needs in the community.”

Dr Chambers says the massive gap in pay between general practice doctors and nurses compared to those employed by Te Whatu Ora in hospitals is also creating huge challenges. The survey found 60% of practices have a current vacancy for a doctor.

“Those of us that work in essential family doctor services are under-the-pump. We’re feeling undervalued and underappreciated, and now we’re also facing severe financial pressure. It is a terribly worrying situation, and the government has shown little interest in working with us on some real solutions.”

Dr Chambers says his own practice is suffering and made a significant loss last month. He says the causes are multi-faceted, and include rising costs, insufficient funding, and few mechanisms to increase income as many fees are capped.

“While we haven’t cut any of our services the reality is we are just not offering as many, and we’ve also closed our books to enrolments.”

His practice is also under-staffed, with vacancies for both doctors and nurses.

The survey found 54% of general practices have reduced services in the past six months, and 17% have reduced their opening hours. Nearly one-quarter of practices are not accepting new enrolments.

The GenPro member survey received 238 responses and was conducted earlier this month (from August 9-18).

Ends.

Attachment: GenPro Member Survey – August 2023

Note: GenPro is a not-for-profit membership association representing the owners and providers of New Zealand's family doctor services and urgent care centres. It has more than 400 members providing general practice services to about half of all New Zealanders.