

Our health and disability system

Hospital and specialist services

Access to consistent high-quality hospital and specialist services is vital to keeping all New Zealanders well and should be available irrespective of where people live.

What's changing?

Hospital and specialist services are currently run by our 20 District Health Boards (DHBs). This means that DHBs have been responsible for ensuring what services are available for their populations and where those services are located.

In the future, Health New Zealand will be responsible for running hospitals and planning specialist services as part of a coherent network to ensure that access is fairer, and people have the right care when they need it.

Why?

While there is some cooperation between DHBs, because they are separate organisations there can be duplication and a lack of coordination in hospital and specialist services. These services tend to benefit from consistency and adoption of best practice; it does not add value for each DHB to design them differently. They also include some very specialist services that only need to be arranged once for the whole of New Zealand.

The fragmentation across DHBs has led to a 'postcode lottery', where the range and quality of care varies significantly depending on where you live.

At the same time, hospitals are not managed as a network, resulting in inefficiency and missed opportunities to run services more equitably and efficiently. Many decisions that could be taken nationally, such as where specialist services are located to best meet people's needs, or where capital is invested in new facilities, are made individually by DHBs. Whilst there is good practice in all corners of the system, this is not easily identified and spread between areas.

Moving to a single nationwide system will improve consistency, sharing of best practice, and long-term planning for new facilities and services where they're most needed, so everyone has access to the care they need, when they need it. It will also allow us to better plan appropriate models of care, making best use of the expertise and tools available to us; including leveraging digital and virtual technologies to enhance access to care.

What will it look like in future?

Local hospitals and specialist services will still be at the heart of care in local communities, although that care will be more consistent across the nation, and better connected to other services.

Whether in Auckland or Whanganui, people will be able to rely on the quality of local services and they will have clear information about how to access specialist care if needed. Hospital and specialist services will operate as a network and be managed regionally to balance national consistency and the best use of local knowledge and expertise.

This will mean that people will be able to access services even if they're not available at their local hospital. This stronger network will be supported by much better use of digital and virtual care, so that the expertise of leading specialists can be drawn on nationwide.

Decisions about where new investments are made – whether in services, buildings or other infrastructure – will reflect people's needs and where investment can make the biggest difference. This will mean better care for more people.

At the same time, better innovation, sharing best practice and shifting more care into primary and community settings will reduce pressure on hospitals. Long-term planning will also make it easier to anticipate demand and respond with investment in our workforce and services.

What's next?

Detailed design work will include engaging with the health sector, communities and consumers on how our hospital and specialist networks should be run. An interim Health NZ organisation will be set up later in 2021 before legislation is passed to establish the formal organisation, likely around mid-2022.

Want to know more?

Further information about the work and progress of the health reforms is available on the DPMC website under the work of the Transition Unit:

www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/transition-unit.