

Increase in Patient Fees

We are very sorry that we have had to increase our patient fees and can understand the frustration and anger that this may cause our patients.

Why has this happened?

This increase is as a direct result of the government imposing significant real terms cut in funding from our services in July 2023 and now again from 1 July 2024. The government commissioned a report released in 2022 that stated that an increase in general practice of over 14% was required then to maintain services. This report was based on data that was several years out of date. This funding increase did not happen.

Since then, cost increases for an average family doctor service are currently rising yearly and yet the government has imposed (without any right of negotiation) a funding increase for your services of only 4%. They have then expected practices to increase the fees you pay to make up the difference.

We want to treat our staff fairly. Our nurses and GPs have continued to provide our essential services despite these funding cuts and the national workforce shortages we are experiencing. Yet the government funds our staff at a much lower level than equivalent doctors and nurses doing the same level of work in government-run hospital settings.

We think that is unfair. We also think it is important that we can retain essential staff to be able to continue providing essential services for you. We are well aware that our staff could choose to go and work overseas or to the local hospital for a higher salary – and they could do so tomorrow.

What if I can't afford the increased fees?

Most importantly, you **should not** avoid seeking medical help when needed.

If you have any problems paying or the cost puts you off from seeing a doctor when you need one – please talk to us about it. We do not want you to miss receiving the care you need.

For medical emergencies, you always have the right to attend and be seen by the Emergency Department at our local hospital – and there is no charge for this service.

What can I do to help?

Firstly, thank you for asking and for allowing us to explain this no-win situation we have found ourselves in. We hope we can start to reverse the government's funding decisions and reduce our fees again.

Your understanding and offer of support is important to us.

You can definitely help. This can be done very simply by e-mailing or writing to our local MP, Rachel Boyack and the Minister of Health to express your concern at the government's decision to reduce funding for essential family doctor services.

We have suggested a possible message for you to send and this is provided on the reverse of this sheet. You are of course welcome to create your own message of support.

In the meantime, your understanding of the no-win situation we find ourselves in would be much appreciated. This is not the fault of your GP or our reception staff.

In fact, we all wish our fees could be lower and fairer for you.

Suggested e-mail to:

Hon Shane Reti
Minister of Health
Email: s.reti@ministers.govt.nz

Rachel Boyack
MP for Nelson
Rachel.boyack@parliament.govt.nz

Kia ora,

I am writing to express my anger at, yet another real terms funding cut imposed on my essential family doctor service from 1 July 2024. Over the last two years, more services have effectively been cut due to the combined real-terms funding cuts the government has imposed without any negotiation. And the shortfall in funding is being passed on to us - the patients, at a time when many of us are struggling to make ends meet.

This is not the action I expect from my government when these essential services are already struggling to recruit and retain staff in the face of historic underfunding.

I understand that the nurses in my family doctor service are still funded at a level which is well below that of their colleagues in the government's own hospital-based service. This is putting the general practice services at risk and is impacting on all New Zealanders ability to access care when they need it.

I note that if I attend the Emergency Department at my local hospital, the service is free of charge. I don't think that would help the unprecedented demand and waiting times they are currently facing.

I urge you to increase the funding to general practices and address the significant crisis which is happening right now before we have no doctors or nurses left to serve in my community.

Ngā mihi

If writing, letter can be addressed to:

Hon Shane Reti
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

Rachel Boyack
MP for Nelson
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160