

Health researchers call for transparency and action

MEDIA RELEASE

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Frustrated health researchers are asking for more transparent and system-embedded processes in the new health system so that the latest research evidence is used to improve the health of New Zealanders.

The Healthier Lives–He Oranga Hauora National Science Challenge, directed by Professor Jim Mann, held a workshop with senior health researchers, officials and service providers late in 2021, to identify the key causes of this frustration and to develop a pathway forward.

Professor Mann notes that there is a lack of effective government policy for some of the most common causes of illness and death in New Zealand:

“We recently commissioned an audit of policies for cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, which found that, with the exception of cancer, overarching policies in these areas are either lacking or out-of-date. Yet there is a wealth of research evidence being produced by researchers in New Zealand and around the world. Something is not working.”

“The New Zealand public expects that tax dollars invested in health research will lead to better health outcomes. But we can’t say for sure that this is actually happening because we don’t have transparent processes for getting critical research evidence into everyday healthcare practice.”

Health researchers and clinicians worry that New Zealand is falling behind other comparable countries in implementing the latest research evidence. Professor Mann says that the inclusion of cutting-edge research in the COVID-19 response shows that it is possible to use the best and most recent evidence to inform healthcare practices.

The Pathways between Research, Policy and Practice report, released today by Healthier Lives, outlines the principles and elements required for equitable and evidence-based policy development and, in turn, for implementing that policy into new healthcare practices and technologies that can improve the lives of New Zealanders.

“The potential is there in the new health system but researchers are anxious to know what the plan is”, Professor Mann says.

“What systems are being put in place to make sure that policies exist for the prevention and treatment of our major non-communicable diseases? How will these policies be informed by research evidence and lived experience, and then translated into action and outcomes?”

“Two of the persistent messages that came through in our workshop were the importance of transparency and the value of establishing relationships between those involved in each step of the pathway. The newly restructured health system provides a unique opportunity to make this happen and the Pathways report outlines the key elements needed to make this work.”

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