



## Covid Restrictions Forcing Permanent Closure of Primary Health Care Providers

Repeated COVID-19 lockdowns is putting the viability of thousands of health care businesses and the wellbeing of the public at risk, warns the New Zealand Chiropractors Association

Acting NZCA President Dr Cassandra Fairest, chiropractor says: 'We warned last year that a crisis in health care provision may be on the horizon and now it is well and truly here. Media regularly reports on the incredible impact on communities and various industries but our Auckland colleagues and their patients are forgotten victims of the latest lockdown'.

'We have had reports of two chiropractic practices closing their doors forever due to this latest lockdown. After 12 weeks of no hands-on patient care in the past year they just can't afford to continue. Most other countries are allowing highly skilled allied health workers such as chiropractors to continue, even under elevated levels with appropriate PPE and infection controls. Are primary healthcare providers less trusted than real estate agents, supermarkets and takeaway restaurants to manage Covid-19 precautions?'

The peak body for chiropractic in New Zealand says that many primary health providers, such as chiropractors, dental health practitioners, acupuncturists, physiotherapists and other allied health professions rely on face to face consultations and fee-based income to survive. Prolonged or repeated restrictions on the delivery of healthcare will lead to widespread insolvency of some businesses and leave thousands of New Zealanders without an option for healthcare in their communities.

Cassandra Fairest says: 'The NZCA Council has written to COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins to again plead our case. Late last year the Ministry asked for submissions on balancing the risk of spread with keeping allied health services going for community well being. We have been told that 'independent advisors' decided the risks outweigh the benefits but have not been given any detail about how they came to this conclusion'.

'Ironically, our members have seen a sharp rise in people seeking care during the pandemic yet during Level 3, chiropractic practices remained closed to anything but an incredibly restrictive criteria for urgent care. While telehealth options over a video consultation can suit certain cases, it is of very limited benefit for hands-on providers. Even Level 2 restrictions impact on the flow and viability of some practices with Auckland facing prolonged difficulties'. 'The Ministry of Health restrictions are particularly hard on chiropractors that depend on hands-on interactions and are paid out of pocket fees by the public. They are highly trained health professionals who have excellent knowledge and ability to screen for COVID symptoms, practice infection control and appropriate PPE use, and have exceptional contact tracing information built into their patient management systems already. These practitioners and their clients that depend on their services are being severely affected by the pandemic response. Of course, many industries are struggling but at least some can still operate with physical distancing or click and collect and still have some income. Our members face a gruelling scenario if rolling lockdowns continue and it is going to end up costing the country in deteriorating public health and elevated longer term healthcare costs'.

Hospitality, tourism, the creative arts, and some other industries are receiving targeted assistance, however those healthcare businesses with no public funding streams, which make up a large portion of essential healthcare services, seem to be a forgotten sector. Chiropractors work in the field of health promotion and wellbeing, something which should be of high importance given the pandemic that we are facing. Having access to healthcare services and the benefits it provides to both the public and the economy should ideally be placed ahead of the 'nice to haves' such as dining out or an adventure holiday. Even before COVID-19, there was a need for Government support of a broader range of healthcare options which currently completely miss out on any funding, such as that given to GP practices and the DHBs and hospital system.

Chiropractors are regulated primary health care professionals registered under the HPCA Act with close to 700 annual practicing certificate holders practising in solo, group, and multidisciplinary clinics around New Zealand. New Zealand chiropractors have significant training (a minimum 5-year tertiary degree) and a broad yet highly skilled scope of practice and clinical expertise. They provide care for the public in a wide range of health concerns, including spinal problems, posture, certain neurological issues and chronic pain. Importantly, particularly with the heightened levels of mental health concerns being seen this year, chiropractors help many people with anxiety, sleeping difficulties and stress related disorders through their ability to assist the nervous system. There has also been an increase in the number of people seeking chiropractic care for postural related strain and stress from working at home. These health concerns highlight how important it is that the public can have access to chiropractors during increasing alert levels.

New Zealand's chiropractors are taking the lead to inform, and inspire people to improve their health and prevent pain and disability by educating the public to have a greater understanding of the relationship between their spine and nervous system and how this affects their function and overall wellbeing.

At a time when people are dealing with significant stress and different health concerns, now more than ever we need to ensure the public has access to all health care services when they need it.

-Ends

**Contacts**

Cassandra Fairest

021 242 3073

mailto:

Peter Boyes

0275540500

mailto: peter@boyespr.co.nz