

20 May 2024

Hon Matt Doocey
Minister for Mental Health
New Zealand Government

CC: Hon Nicola Willis, Minister of Finance of New Zealand

Tēnā koe Minister Doocey,

As leading mental health organisations focused on improving the lives of every New Zealander, we are urging the Coalition Government to put mental health and wellbeing at the heart of the upcoming budget.

Not too long ago, you described our country as one with a skyrocketing rate of mental distress, overstretched services, growing workforce vacancies, and daily outcry from the public for better access to mental health support.

You were right.

Despite 50–80% of New Zealanders experiencing mental distress or addiction challenges in their lifetime, our current system falls woefully short in its ability to provide adequate mental health support for our communities.

Too many people are falling through the cracks of a system operating at crisis level. It is overwhelmed by demand and crippled by neglect and chronic underinvestment.

This is particularly worrying for the estimated 260,000 and growing number of New Zealanders with moderate-to-severe mental health issues. Without access to the right support, tāngata whaiora experience higher levels of psychological distress, which puts pressure on emergency departments, the workforce and families and whānau caring after their loved ones.

Serious mental illness, including addiction, costs the government an estimated \$12 billion every year. It also sets us back on the targets set by the government to reduce stay times in emergency departments and wait times for first specialist assessments.

We represent diverse professions and organisations, but we are united in our belief that as a nation, we must do everything possible to support tāngata whaiora to live well, get well and stay well.

Bad mental health policy is bad for the economy, and you said it best when you said that we have a lot to catch up on when it comes to mental health.

With investment in mental health, we can create a system that is designed and resourced to care for people who need it the most. New Zealanders cannot afford to wait any longer. We must prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of our communities.

Mental health care is not an optional extra, it is fundamental to the wellbeing and prosperity of our nation and people.

Mauri Ora,

