

19 May 2024

Health Hawke's Bay response to NZ Doctor Article: "Te Whatu Ora estimate half of general practice work can be done by Telehealth" - 8 May 2024.

*Te Oranga o Te Matau-a-Māui Health Hawke's Bay stands with the other PHOs and GPNZ statements and refutes the claim in the recent Te Whatu Ora webinar that 50% of GP work can be resolved via telehealth.*

*Chief Executive Irihāpeti Mahuika said, "the claim that this large amount of primary care can be delivered over the phone or video completely undermines the hard work our GPs do in our communities".*

*"This claim also demonstrates a lack of understanding from Te Whatu Ora on what happens during a primary care appointment. Our GPs know their communities, and they know their patients. The whanaungatanga between a patient and GP that grows from face-to-face appointments is something that can't be recreated in a telehealth setting. We know that seeing the same health provider, allowing that continuity of care leads to improved long term health outcomes for patients.*

*"Another concerning fact this statement raises is that there is a lack of understanding as to what happens during a GP consult. We see patients presenting with more complex conditions and although may present with just one condition, a doctor can conduct various routine tests that can help them understand a wider picture of a patient's condition, or identify other areas of concern which can't be done over a telehealth appointment.*

*"From a health equity perspective, for many in our Māori and Pacific populations, telehealth is not a suitable substitute and should this become the norm, we will see many in these communities stop engaging with primary care, resulting in poorer health outcomes. We already know that these communities have poorer health outcomes. We need to work with our communities to ensure they can access primary care in a way that engages and connects with them, their whānau, their tikanga and mana.*

*"However, I do want to emphasise that we do agree that there is a place for telehealth within the health system as an option for care should it be suitable for the patient. We also know that telehealth works well when backed up with good in person care. We have worked closely with Practice Plus over the past few months to support our communities and our practices with capacity and afterhours, and the impact has been very positive with great feedback. Their model also keeps primary care with a patients local provider, feeding back information for follow up from their usual practice. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us it is possible and if done well, is an option, but is not a solution to the problem we are facing.*

*"I invite Te Whatu Ora to talk through their evidence for this with us and spend time with our GPs and in our clinics to understand the importance of face-to-face appointments, and the concerns and impacts the proposed model of telehealth would bring to Hawke's Bay" she concluded.*