



Neurological Foundation of NZ  
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Auckland 1148

7 February 2024

Hon Dr Shane Reti  
Minister of Health  
Private Bag 18888  
Parliament Buildings  
WELLINGTON 6160

E te Minita, tēnā koe,

### **Congratulations and introduction to the Neurological Alliance of New Zealand**

Congratulations on your appointment as the Minister of Health. This is a critically important portfolio and one that brings with it significant challenge and opportunities. We look forward to engaging with you on practical ways to improve the health and wellbeing of the growing numbers of New Zealanders with neurological conditions.

As you know, neurological conditions place a significant burden on health and disability systems in Aotearoa and this is worsening as our population grows and ages. The Neurological Alliance (the Alliance) estimates that one in three New Zealanders will be affected by a neurological condition at some point in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> According to mortality data, one in five deaths in Aotearoa are caused by a neurological condition.<sup>2</sup>

We have pooled the collective knowledge of the twenty members of the Alliance to identify the four most important actions Government can take to optimise brain health, reduce inequities and better serve people in our communities with neurological conditions. Our priorities are based on feedback from our members who are working daily supporting thousands of people with neurological conditions, and their carers/whānau.

We have attached for your reference a two page *At a Glance* infographic (which provides statistics on neurological conditions and a summary description of our four priorities) and a briefing to you as incoming Minister on these priorities; namely:

- 1) Address health workforce shortages to speed up diagnosis and treatment
- 2) Increase funding for pharmaceutical treatment to improve quality of life
- 3) Increase funding for community-based care and support services
- 4) Improve data collection on neurological conditions

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<sup>1</sup> This reflects the data from the Global Burden of Disease for the time year period ending 2019.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/our-health-system/data-and-statistics/mortality-web-tool/>

Information accessed via a recent Official Information Act request to Te Whatu Ora reveals how critical neurological health workforce shortages are with only 47.8 (FTE) neurologists and 71.5 (FTE) neurology nurses across all our public hospitals (November 2023). These shortages, along with those in the broader health workforce, have a cascading impact on our other priorities, resulting in lengthy waiting times, plus diagnostic and treatment delays.

### **Meeting Government international commitments**

By working with the Alliance to further our four priorities, the Government would be demonstrating its commitment to meeting its obligations as signatory to the UNCRPD and the World Health Organisation (WHO) Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Conditions (2022-31).

#### *United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - UNCRPD*

Many people have neurological conditions that cause significant long-term disability. In its recent Observations Report (September 2022), the Committee monitoring our implementation of the UNCRPD made a number of recommendations<sup>3</sup> that would improve the quality of life of many New Zealanders with disabilities. We encourage you to work with Ministers across portfolios including Whaikaha, Social Development and ACC, to ensure each recommendation is enacted.

#### *WHO Intersectoral Global Action Plan (IGAP) on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Conditions (2022-31)*

New Zealand is one of 194 member states that approved the IGAP ten year roadmap to reduce the stigma, impact and burden of neurological conditions in 2022. Please refer to the two page summary of the IGAP (IGAP Unpacked<sup>4</sup>) and note the overlap with the Alliance's four priorities.

### **Pharmac**

We welcome the new portfolio of Associate Minister of Health (Pharmac) and will be contacting Hon David Seymour directly in relation to our second priority, to increase funding for pharmaceutical treatment to the improve quality of life of people with neurological conditions.

### **Next steps**

We request an opportunity to meet with you to discuss our four priorities and to provide you with further information on the challenges facing the neurological community and the organisations which support them.

Ngā mihi nui



Catherine Hall (Chair) Neurological Alliance

Copy to: Hon. David Seymour, Hon Matt Doocey, Hon. Casey Costello, Abbe Anderson - Te Whatu Ora, Martin Hefford - Te Whatu Ora, Andy Inder - Te Whatu Ora

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<sup>3</sup> For a list of Lead and Supporting Agencies responsible for implementing Concluding Observation Recommendations refer to [Appendix-One-Mapping-Concluding-Observation-recommendations-to-Lead-and-Supporting-agencies.pdf](https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Appendix-One-Mapping-Concluding-Observation-recommendations-to-Lead-and-Supporting-agencies.pdf) ([whaikaha.govt.nz](https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz))

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ibe-epilepsy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/IGAP-Unpacked\\_Guide\\_V2.pdf](https://www.ibe-epilepsy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/IGAP-Unpacked_Guide_V2.pdf)