

11 December 2019

Committee Secretariat
Health Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

By email: he@parliament.govt.nz

Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Bill

Dear Sir/Madam

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to provide feedback on the above Bill. The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with more than 5,000 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. We recognise the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi and the special obligations to Māori, particularly to ensure equity and active protection. Current disparities in health outcomes between Māori and non-Māori are unacceptable. The NZMA is committed to advocating for policies in health and the social and wider determinants of health that urgently address these disparities and contribute to equity of health outcomes.

We welcome this Bill and strongly support the establishment of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. When the Mental Health Commission was disestablished in 2012, the NZMA was concerned that we were losing an independent monitor and advocate for people with mental health concerns. Earlier this year, we welcomed the announcement of an Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission.¹ We note that the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission which this Bill would establish is to be an independent Crown entity that would have the following functions:

- assess and report publicly on the mental health and wellbeing of people in New Zealand
- assess and report publicly on factors that affect people's mental health and wellbeing
- assess and report publicly on the effectiveness, efficiency, and adequacy of approaches to mental health and wellbeing
- promote alignment, collaboration, and communication between entities involved in mental health and wellbeing
- advocate for the collective interests of people who experience mental distress or addiction (or both), and the persons (including family and whānau) who support them.

¹ NZMA Applauds the Appointment of the Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. 12 September 2019. <https://www.nzma.org.nz/news-and-events/media-releases/nzma-applauds-the-appointment-of-the-initial-mental-health-and-wellbeing-commission>

We recommend the Commission be strengthened by requiring at least some of the members of the Board to be subject matter experts or authorities in mental health and wellbeing. While this was a requirement in the draft Terms of Reference for the Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission,² we note that there is no such requirement in the current Bill.

We also believe that the functions of the Commission need to be expanded to enable it to address the social and other determinants of mental health and wellbeing. Again, while the draft Terms of Reference for the Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission specifically mention the social determinants of health (and identify examples such as housing, employment, poverty, isolation, racism and the environment), no such reference is made in the Bill beyond a reporting function on factors that affect people's mental health and wellbeing.

We hope our feedback is helpful. We are not seeking an oral hearing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. Baddock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dr Kate Baddock
NZMA Chair

² Available from <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-09/Draft%20TOR%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Commission.pdf>