

Media Statement: 23 February 2022

New Zealand's COVID response is collapsing amid on-the-spot decision making

New Zealand's COVID response has become a reactive series of on-the-spot decisions in the absence of credible planning and a lack of consultation and engagement with health providers whom the Government is now expecting to manage out-of-control levels of infection and community demand.

That's according to GenPro (The national association for providers of general practice services), whose objectives include improving the health of the population of New Zealand and advocating for high-quality, accessible and equitable patient care.



GenPro's Chair, Dr Tim Malloy, said "For many months, GenPro has been offering to work with the Ministry of Health to develop a robust community response plan for the inevitable situation that we knew was coming. But instead of joint planning, engagement and consultation we have been kept in the dark awaiting a series of last-minute podium announcements with health providers un-prepared and un-resourced.

"Now, the predictable pressure has hit the country's limited laboratory testing capacity, and in the absence of an agreed plan, has resulted in a reactive scramble which just seeks to delay the inevitable collapse".

A Ministry of Health announcement today, 23 February 2022, has advised the public that they can now access much needed Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) at general practice sites as well as existing community testing centres (CTCs) around the country. Yet there has been no consultation or engagement with those health providers ahead of the announcement and most have no supplies of the required RAT tests – just 24 hours from when the public will be queuing for the service, as they have already been at CTCs.

In December 2021, the Government's announcement of an extra \$644 million for hospital upgrades (including 23 new Intensive Care and High Dependency beds) was welcomed, but GenPro also advised at the time (before there was any community transmission of Omicron in New Zealand) that it would not help the potential 45,000 COVID positive patients per week that would likely be isolating in the community by March 2022. While the very nature of the pandemic is rapidly changing, that exact scenario has come to fruition and the COVID response is lacking.

Dr Malloy said that patients are understandably angry at the lack of service. "I am hearing first hand reports of significant queues and fighting amongst members of the public who are not able to access the COVID testing or support they are being promised. General practice and community providers are being turned into the enemy for these individuals and their whānau who are understandably desperate for reassurance and support.

"It is unacceptable that health professionals who dedicate their careers to supporting their local communities are now taking the blame for a mess which could have been avoided with better joint planning. It is time for serious action and direct engagement with the representative bodies of those front-line health providers rather than multiple layers of management that have no direct accountability to individual general practices or the communities they serve".

ENDs

Further information can be obtained from:

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The New Zealand Medical Association's Red Letter dated 22 February 2022 also emphasises the impact that the current unplanned expectations upon general practice are having. It can be read here:

<https://www.nzma.org.nz/news-and-media/news/nzma-red-letter-covid-in-the-community-expectations-of-general-practice/>

GenPro is advised that Community Testing Centres received supplies of RAT tests on Monday (21 February 2022) and that after two days supplies are already running out before they are due to be available in general practices on Thursday 24 February.

GenPro's statement on 17 December 2021 predicted the current levels of community COVID infections and called for better engagement and planning. It can be read here: <https://genpro.org.nz/docs/Media-Release-17-December-2021.pdf>