

Media Release: 29 July 2021

Localities offer a great opportunity to focus on the needs of patients, but caution is required

The development of Localities (also being called local wellbeing networks) as part of the Government's programme of health reform is a great opportunity to focus on the needs of patients, according to GenPro, the national representative body for general practice and urgent care centres across New Zealand, 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 (pictured), said, "There is much to be optimistic about with this chance to develop Localities underpinned by a renewed focus on the needs of patients. But we must also be careful. The similarities to the Government's intent at the time of the 2001 Primary Health Strategy are striking, so we need to ensure that we learn from the lessons of the past and in particular the success or otherwise of Primary Health Organisations".

In response to a request for advice from the [Health Reform] Transition Unit, GenPro has today delivered a submission intended to support the successful development of Localities, entitled *Function before form: What does my community need?*

The submission, prepared in consultation with, and including direct input from GenPro members, deliberately avoids stipulating a specific organisational framework for Localities. Instead, it sets out a range of principles and criteria which GenPro states should be used to guide the development of each Locality and also to judge their success.

Dr Malloy went on to say, "There is also a significant risk associated with the immense scale of the Government's proposed structural reform. There are very few parts of our health system that will not be directly impacted through the abolition of DHBs, the abolition of many or all PHOs, the establishment of the Māori Health Authority and Health New Zealand. Ensuring the sustainability and continuity of current community-based service provision will be the foundation from which we can build the collaboration and new services anticipated through Localities".

GenPro also calls for "honesty and realism" to help ensure that the value of Localities become greater than the sum of their parts. "Simply saying that primary care must provide more services, more integration and more choice does not magically make it happen. Such developments must be appropriately defined and appropriately funded. That was not the case following the 2001 Primary Health Strategy", said Dr Malloy.

GenPro's submission also includes an offer to make available GenPro's support and expertise to work with the Government to develop their proposed principles and criteria on behalf of the communities that they serve across the country.

ENDS

Further information can be obtained from:

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Function before form: What does my community need? 29 July 2021.
www.genpro.org.nz/docs/functionbeforeform.pdf