

## The Pae Ora Healthy Futures Bill and health reforms

Terry Taylor

In 2018, the then Minister of Health, Hon Dr David Clark announced that he was setting up a comprehensive independent review of the current Health and Disability System. The expert review panel was chaired by Heather Simpson and included six other experts from a variety of backgrounds and stakeholders within the health system. The aim of the review was to identify opportunities to improve the performance, structure, and sustainability of the system with a goal of achieving equity of outcomes, and contributing to wellness for all, particularly Māori and Pacific peoples.

After a meeting with the Hon Dr David Clark in 2018 the NZIMLS Executive was encouraged to provide professional input to the review panel. The NZIMLS Executive had a meeting with Professor Peter Crampton from the panel to submit background on the profession of medical laboratory science, and the challenges that the profession faces operating within the current health system structure.

The reporting timeframes were initially set but due to the COVID-19 pandemic the final report was not released until June 2020 (1). The report provided a comprehensive overview and recommendations that few working in the health sector would have disagreed with. From the time the report was released the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), under the leadership of Stephen McKernan, began working on the white paper summary. On April 21<sup>st</sup> 2021 the Health Minister, the Hon Andrew Little publicly released the white paper containing the Cabinet signed off plan for reforming the Health and Disability System (2). The outcome of this was a new national operational entity to be called Health NZ alongside a Māori Health Authority (MHA) and the formation of a national Public Health Agency (PHA).

That was the start of the consultation and engagement phase within the newly formed Health Transition Unit (HTU) within the DPMC. Prominent health stakeholders provided detailed assessments and were able to meet and provide position papers and recommendations for the merger of publicly funded health services into Health NZ governance. The NZIMLS Executive on behalf of the NZIMLS provided a submission, and position document with professional recommendations and has had meetings and correspondence with the leadership of the HTU.

At this time the NZIMLS Executive on behalf of the NZIMLS, was involved in providing submissions on the future structure of the PHA which will be a national agency that will provide significant public health research and diagnostic testing input into Health NZ and the MHA. Within this proposed structure there is a strong hint of an overarching governance position for an appropriate expert specialist medical laboratory scientist. The NZIMLS Executive has been lobbying hard for a Chief Medical Scientist Officer position for several years and it finally appears like that will end up within the PHA.

The legislation for the health reforms, the Pae Ora Health Futures bill, was released to Parliament on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and underwent the first reading on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021 (3).

The bill was referred to the Pae Ora Legislation Select Committee and submissions were called for with a closing date of 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021. The NZIMLS Executive on behalf of the NZIMLS provided a submission to this Bill (4) and appeared by Zoom in front of the Select Committee on January 28<sup>th</sup> 2022. Unfortunately we were due to appear in person but the emergence of Omicron in the community put paid to that. The second Parliamentary reading of the legislation was voted in on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 and is currently awaiting the third and final reading before being incorporated into law as an Act before July 1<sup>st</sup> 2022. Following Royal Assent by the Governor General, all DHB's will cease to exist and all health and disability system governance and functions merge into Health NZ with oversight from the MHA and PHA. The Ministry of Health (MOH) will take on a purely policy implementation role and pass on all operational functions to the new health entities.

The Health NZ and MHA Boards have all been appointed and the Board Chairs are Rob Campbell and Co-chairs Sharon Shea and Tipa Mahuta respectively. The Chief Executive of Health NZ is Margie Apa and the Chief Executive of the MHA is Riana Manuel. There have been no leadership appointments to the PHA as at 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

Over the period of the health reforms the NZIMLS Executive has been involved with hui and discussion documents with other medical professional colleagues. The NZIMLS Executive on behalf of the NZIMLS has provided integral input into collaborative publications and position reports throughout 2021. These include Creating Solutions, A roadmap to health equity 2040 (5), Role of laboratory science in the future of public health (2021 MOH in draft), and the NZIMLS position statements on merging into Health NZ, as well as wider Allied Health discussions on merging into Health NZ.

Through this continued involvement the NZIMLS Executive is optimistic that the health reforms will provide a positive effect on the diagnostic laboratory industry. To have been recognised as a key contributor at every step has been a credit to the NZIMLS proactive approach and newly found political and professional clout.

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