

9 April 2024

Mr Gary Kircher  
Mayor  
Waitaki District Council  
20 Thames Street  
Oamaru 9400

By Email: [gkircher@waitaki.govt.nz](mailto:gkircher@waitaki.govt.nz)

### Service continuity for the Waitaki Community

Dear Mayor Kircher

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me last week. It was a good opportunity to hear from you and discuss our shared commitment to health services in Waitaki. This letter describes the action we are taking to ensure continuity of services and protection of frontline healthcare staff that deliver that care.

We will be ending our current contract with Waitaki District Health Services Limited (WDHSL) and are proposing to take over the provision of contracted services ourselves with clinical and management leadership from within Health New Zealand (Health NZ) from 1 July 2024. This is because we cannot sustain the current funding level requested from WDHSL and believe it will be more cost effective for us to deliver care in the short term.

Our teams are planning the transition of the management and delivery of services currently managed by WDHSL to Health NZ. Health NZ is committed to ensuring health services continue for the people of Waitaki. I expect that any transition happens with minimal disruption, that includes staff transferring to Health NZ and the service transition being seamless for the community.

Regarding community concerns that the hospital may be closed, I can confirm that there is no plan to close Ōamaru Hospital or withdraw any current services. Rural healthcare is a priority in the Healthy Futures | Pae Ora legislation and the development of a Rural Health strategy is required by this legislation. Furthermore, the interim NZ Health Plan also prioritises rural healthcare development. I am committed to ensure community input into how those services can be improved and would appreciate your guidance on how we can ensure this happens.

Health NZ sees Ōamaru Hospital as an important part of the healthcare network in the Waitaki District and has an important role to play in the wellbeing of the community. We do need to ensure that future health service provision is clinically and financially sustainable. This means looking at models of care that enable better access for Waitaki communities and reduce the inconvenience of travel that many experience with care.

We have been working for some months with local Waitaki community leaders on how we can improve services in the future. Led by local leaders, the Te Waka Hauora o Waitaki Health Futures project is underway and is strongly supported by Health NZ. This project is about how all (including hospital and specialist services) publicly funded health services in the Waitaki District can work together to provide comprehensive

local services that meet local need and overcome some of the challenges in access to health services and inequity of health outcomes some rural communities experience.

This will be achieved by developing a health care model covering the whole range of health care services in Waitaki including Ōamaru Hospital, ensuring community access and that they are on a financially and clinically sustainable footing. We hope Council will continue to work with us on Te Waka Hauora o Waitaki Health Futures project. We discussed, for example, opportunities to reduce the cost of travel for Waitaki residents to specialist care and ways that technology can enable more virtual consultations to improve convenience to residents. The local community is fortunate to have a strong team of dedicated healthcare professionals in Waitaki.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for caring for Ōamaru Hospital and ensuring it is part of the enduring health service delivery landscape in the Waitaki District.

Ngā mihi nui



Fepuleai Margie Apa  
Tumu Whakarae | Chief Executive  
**Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora**

cc: Alex Parmley, Abbe Anderson, Fionnagh Dougan, Chiquita Hansen, Aroha Metcalf, Rachel Haggerty, Hamish Brown, Di Sarfati