

17 December, 2020

### **Independent external expert review of He Puna Waiora mental health unit released**

Waitematā District Health Board (DHB) has today publicly released an independent external review of its He Puna Waiora inpatient mental health unit following the deaths of two patients in May 2019 due to suspected suicide.

The review was commissioned by the DHB's Board and Executive immediately following the deaths to gain independent insights into how the unit was functioning clinically, its governance arrangements and any issues relating to the facility itself.

Director of Mental Health Derek Wright extended the DHB's deepest sympathies and apologies to the families of the patients who had died and recognised the contribution they had made to the review process, including making themselves available for interview by the review panel.

"The input of the families has been invaluable. We thank them for their courage in assisting the review and we also recognise that life will never be the same for them after the loss of their loved ones. We are deeply sorry and we are committed to doing better," Mr Wright said.

"We cannot turn back time but we can learn from the past and make changes that will minimise the potential for inpatient deaths in future while recognising that it is impossible to remove all risk, as the report notes.

"The DHB unconditionally accepts the review findings and we will continue to implement them in full. Many of the recommendations have already been addressed over the last 18 months while the review has been in progress. Those recommendations that have not yet been addressed will be addressed. We will keep going until everything in the report has been implemented.

"We welcome the scrutiny and we are proactively releasing the report because we believe only good will come from 'letting the sunshine in'. Although the report is confronting in parts, we fully accept our duty to be accountable for our care, noting that He Puna Waiora is a different and safer unit today than it was in May 2019."

The DHB has proactively made the report public at the first opportunity, having received the finalised document from the review panel chair late on Friday and then briefed the DHB's Board at yesterday's scheduled meeting.

Mr Wright said the DHB was also proactively sharing the report and the actions it had taken since May 2019 with other DHB mental health services around the country in the hope it may also assist their ongoing improvement work.

He recognised the staff of He Puna Waiora for their ongoing commitment to high-quality patient care and said the report identified systemic and culture issues that existed in the unit at that time which the DHB accepted responsibility for.

"Our people are highly motivated to help and care for others. Staff in the unit are highly skilled professional clinicians, always striving to do their very best for our patients and community.

"We back our people to keep doing their jobs and will keep making the changes needed to support them to do so to the very highest standard possible."

**ENDS**

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