

## **More investment needed in public health**

New Zealand public health doctors are calling for increased sustained funding to public health units to enable them to respond effectively to public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 threat.

Public health units are at the forefront of dealing with the COVID-19 response and are responsible for monitoring the progress of the disease, contact tracing of those who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 and implementation of containment and control activities. These activities are vital to effectively slow the spread of the disease.

However, budgets for public health units have not been increased in many years. Even without the impact of COVID-19, resources are very limited, which affects New Zealand's ability to respond to this outbreak and to others like the recent measles and mumps epidemics. More funding, and a more sustainable funding model, is needed to support public health units in this work, says the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine.

"There are now more than 115,000 people confirmed to have COVID-19 virus worldwide", says the College President, Dr Felicity Dumble. "And this figure is likely to increase. The World Health Organization has declared that this is a pandemic."

The College says that experience in China and Singapore shows that, with the right strategies, it is possible to contain the spread of COVID-19. The Ministry's response to the worldwide outbreak has been appropriate to the level of infection in NZ at this stage. However, even with the low number of cases to date, public health units are under enormous strain. Since the spread of the virus is expected to continue for a considerable period, additional resources will be needed to manage the load and to prepare for future similar emergencies.

The College points out that since outbreak will impact across all sectors of society, a non-partisan, whole of government, approach will be needed to deal with the outbreak over the coming months.

"Political commitment and leadership, strong governance, and an intersectoral, whole-of-government approach is what is needed, along with increased investment in public health" says Dr Dumble.

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*About the NZCPHM*

The [New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine](#) is the professional body representing the medical specialty of public health medicine in New Zealand. It has 222 members, all of whom are medical doctors, including 185 fully qualified Public Health Medicine Specialists, with most others being registrars completing advanced training in the specialty of public health medicine.

Public Health Medicine is the branch of medicine concerned with the assessment of population health and health care needs, the development of policy and strategy, health promotion, the control and prevention of disease, and the organisation of services. The College strives to achieve health gain and equity for our population, reducing inequalities across socioeconomic and cultural groups, and promoting environments in which everyone can be healthy.

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