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Focus on population health in Simpson Report welcome, says College of Public Health Medicine

A much stronger focus on population health as indicated by The Health and Disability System review is long overdue and an essential component of a revamped New Zealand health system, the College of Public Health Medicine says.

The review stresses the importance of a population health approach and notes that “Improving population health must become the driver of all planning within the system”.

“Covid-19 brought into sharp relief the critical role and importance of population health measures,” President Dr Felicity Dumble said.

“While ‘population health’ has not been highly valued by our policymakers in recent times, with investment preferred in other more politically attractive areas of the health system, we’ve just had a very close encounter with what happens if you don’t invest in it and value it – which New Zealand hasn’t done to any great degree for a long time.”

Dr Dumble was particularly pleased that the review recognises the financial constraints that population health services have been operating under.

The review estimated that combined Ministry of Health and DHB spend is equivalent to just two per cent of total DHB expenditure, and the fact that “the only increase to the Public Health Services Appropriation since 2010 has been for specific new services or initiatives” (p83).

“The review has been called a ‘once-in-a-generation’ report which makes the focus on further investing in a population health approach that much more important.

“How we structure our health systems now will have a massive impact on the wellbeing of future generations so we can’t afford to get this wrong. This is also an important opportunity to achieve health equity for Māori.

“And while we are obviously very keen to see the review’s recommendations translated into actual, on-the-ground outcomes, we feel things are very definitely headed in the right direction.”

ENDS

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