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Tēnā koe Belinda

As you know, health practitioners have an important role in identifying and raising concerns about possible signs of child harm, abuse, or neglect. Health practitioners may be the first to notice signs of child abuse or neglect due to their regular interactions with children and their families and whānau. This proximity enables the health system to play an important role in the early detection and reporting of child abuse.

To support health practitioners in protecting the safety of children, I am writing to all responsible authorities legislated for by the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 emphasising the importance of child protection training and asking responsible authorities to encourage health practitioners to participate in child protection training.

It is critical that health practitioners who work with children are aware of possible signs of abuse and neglect, different types of abuse, and steps they are expected to take when they have concerns, including how to manage crisis situations and the importance of reporting and sharing information to support child safety. The health system and its workforce have legislative and professional obligations regarding child protection, and training can improve awareness and practise.

All Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) regions have individual child protection policies in place, as required under the Children's Act 2014. Health New Zealand is currently developing a new National Child Protection Policy for both Health New Zealand and the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora to standardise and strengthen child protection policies across the health sector. This will provide national-level guidance on recognising signs of abuse and neglect, reporting concerns to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) or the New Zealand Police, expectations for interagency collaboration, and requirements for staff training.

In cases of suspected child abuse and neglect, there are processes that health practitioners are required to take which are set out in a Memorandum of Understanding between Health New Zealand, Oranga Tamariki, and the New Zealand Police. This includes expectations on health practitioners to notify Oranga Tamariki of all cases of suspected child abuse and neglect, and processes when infants, children, and young people are admitted to hospital following suspected or confirmed abuse or neglect.

The Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and the Family Violence Act 2018 provide a framework for information sharing between health professionals and other agencies to support the protection of children. Associated guidance helps health practitioners to share information appropriately and provides practical advice on how to handle information sharing requests and the circumstances under which information can be shared to protect children.

The Family Violence Act 2018 aims to protect victims of family violence, including children, by promoting their safety and wellbeing. It is the primary legislation that supports the *Family Violence Assessment and Intervention Guideline: Child Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence*, a comprehensive resource to support health professionals in identifying and responding to cases of interpersonal violence effectively and safely.

The health sector is funded to implement this guidance through the Violence Intervention Programme (VIP). The VIP aims to reduce and prevent the health impacts of violence and abuse through early identification, assessment, and referral of people who would benefit from specialist supports or health services. Health New Zealand has regional VIP co-ordinators and national training facilitators who deliver training and provide information about relevant services and referral processes to health professionals. Training and resources are available, and Health New Zealand is making changes to support more online training options. If you would like updated copies of the documents referenced in this letter, you can contact FVSV@tewhatuora.govt.nz and these will be sent to you as they are available.

To ensure that all health practitioners who work with children understand their responsibilities and obligations and are confident in exercising these requirements, it is important that they undertake child protection training, including refresher training when needed.

I would appreciate your support in encouraging health practitioners registered with your authority to attend training. Your support in this area is invaluable, and I trust that you will take the necessary steps in response to this letter. Together, the health system can support wider government efforts to keep children safe.

Thank you for your ongoing work in this space.

Nāku noa, nā



Audrey Sonerson
Director-General of Health
Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora