

Our health and disability system

Rural health

Rural communities face specific health challenges that are not always shared by more urban communities. It is important that the health and disability system recognises and accounts for these challenges in the way that it works in the future.

What's changing? Why?

Rural communities often find it difficult to physically access healthcare, especially specialist and hospital care. In some areas, it can even be hard to access basic health services. In addition, poor internet access and digital capabilities can make it more difficult for people to manage their own care or take up options that are available to others. All of this makes it harder to achieve good health outcomes for rural populations.

Many of the changes to the health system will have a positive impact on the health outcomes of rural communities. For example:

- the creation of a Māori Health Authority will give much greater support to rural Māori communities to design and sustain kaupapa Māori services
- the shift to a locality network model will ensure that primary and community care in rural areas will be better designed to meet local needs and priorities
- the move to hospital and specialist networks will improve the consistency of access to these services for rural populations across the country
- the increased focus on using technology to support more digital care will make it easier for those living rurally to access specialist care when they need it.

What will it look like in future?

Rural communities will continue to be served by a skilled workforce of health professionals. These health professionals will be better supported to deliver more care in the community and this care will be designed around the needs and priorities of rural communities. This will include a greater focus on using technology to deliver more care digitally where this is appropriate. Community care will also be delivered in a more integrated way so that as people move between services their information can move with them.

When rural communities need access to hospital or specialist care, there will be greater clarity and consistency on which services they can expect to be able to access, and where these services will be delivered.

What's next?

There is still detailed design work to be done on how the new system will work in practice. This work will include engaging with rural health professionals, consumers, whānau, and communities, on areas such as:

- how we can strengthen our rural workforce to ensure sustainable care
- how we can ensure primary and community care networks are designed to meet the needs of rural communities
- how digital technologies can be used to improve access to care for rural communities.

Want to know more?

Further information about the work and progress of the health reforms is available on the DPMC website under the work of the Transition Unit:

www.dPMC.govt.nz/our-business-units/transition-unit