

Meeting with Roger Sowry, Chair of Whakarongorau

Due to MO:	26 March 2025	Reference	HNZ00083267
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
From:	Martin Hefford, Director Living Well, National Commissioning		
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Contact for further discussion			
Name	Position	Phone	1st contact
Martin Hefford	Director Living Well, National Commissioning	s 9(2)(a)	x
Tim Wood	Group Manager Planned and Unplanned Care		

Attachments
Appendix 1: Biographies of attendees

About the meeting

Purpose	To support you in your meeting with Roger Sowry, Chair of Whakarongorau Aotearoa.
Date	Thursday 27 March 2025
Time	10.00am – 10.30am
Venue	Minister's office
Attendees	Roger Sowry, Chair Whakarongorau Aotearoa Board Note a biography for Mr Sowry is attached as Appendix 1
Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora officials	Martin Hefford, Director Living Well
Media	No media are expected
Talking points	You may want to: S9(2)(g)(i)

Purpose

1. This meeting briefing provides you with information to support your meeting with Roger Sowry, Chair of Whakarongorau Aotearoa.

Background and context

2. Health NZ funds Whakarongorau Aotearoa (Whakarongorau) to deliver the National Telehealth Service (the Service). Formerly Homecare Medical, the organisation was renamed to Whakarongorau Aotearoa - New Zealand Telehealth Services in 2021.
3. Whakarongorau is co-owned by two Primary Health Organisations (ProCare and Pegasus Health). ProCare delivers healthcare services across the Auckland and Northland districts, while Pegasus Health delivers healthcare services across Canterbury.

4. The Service enables people to access health information, support and advice from trained health advisors and professionals through digital, multi-media and virtual services on an integrated platform, using a range of communication channels.
5. Of the multiple services that are offered by Whakarongorau, most fit under three areas:
 - the Health Services teams (covering physical health);
 - the Mental Health Services team (covering mental health); and
 - the Family and Sexual Harm team (covering social health).
6. The NTS services include Healthline, Quitline, Poisons Helpline, Emergency Triage, 1737 Need to Talk? GP After - Hours Service, Alcohol Drug Helpline, Gambling Helpline, Depression Helpline and The Low Down.
7. Healthline, one of the services offered, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.
8. The Poisons Helpline (subcontracted to University of Otago) provides advice to people and community for suspected poisonings and to hospital clinicians managing patients who have been poisoned.
9. Within the National Telehealth Service, there are 12 clinical teams, with around 600 staff working from contact centres in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch or from their homes.

National Telehealth Service Contract

10. The National Telehealth Service is currently contracted under a 10-year agreement covering 2015 to 2025. This was extended to mid-2026 s 9(2)(b)(ii), s 9(2)(j)
11. S9(2)(b)(ii), S9(2)(j)
14. In addition to the National Telehealth Service, Whakarongorau also partners with other government agencies to deliver additional services and clinical support, including the Ministry of Social Development, the National Screening Unit, former District Health Boards and Primary Health Organisations, Women's Refuge, Presbyterian Support Network, The New Zealand Defence Force, and the Department of Corrections.

Matters for discussion

Review and re-Procurement of national telehealth services

15. Whakarongorau will be interested to talk to you about the review of telehealth services that Health NZ recently completed. The review began in early 2024 with a focus on Health NZ funded health advice and helpline services that support people to access community and primary care, including mental health and addiction services.
16. It explored areas where the Service, including Healthline and related services and other telehealth services could improve access and outcomes and work better to support primary care and community health services. Whakarongorau provided service user insights that were included in the review.
17. The key findings and proposed future direction are encompassed within the Healthline and Related Services Telehealth Review Summary Report. This report is completed and is undergoing internal Health NZ review pending release. The review has set the direction for the design and re-procurement approach for the Service, including Healthline, mental health and addiction helplines and other related helpline services.
18. Health NZ has had ongoing engagement with Whakarongorau, as the current Service provider, about the review and has informed it of the decision to progress towards open tender procurement. It has also shared the summary report for feedback on possible redactions of commercially sensitive information prior to publication.
19. s 9(2)(j)

Recent announcements – Digital access to 24/7 primary care design and consultation.

20. In March you announced that general practice will receive a \$285 million uplift over three years. The funding will cover a set of primary care initiatives focused on improving health outcomes.
21. The initiatives aim to make it easier for people to see a doctor or nurse at their local GP clinic in a timely manner – and will also offer alternative consultation options such as a 24/7 digital health consultation service.
22. Whakarongorau will be interested to talk to you about the 24/7 primary care digital health consultation service that was part of your recent announcements. This service is intended to complement access to primary care, help manage demand for primary care services and include care for people not enrolled with a practice.
23. Health NZ has fully engaged Whakarongorau, along with other providers in the market, in discussions to help shape the new 24/7 teleconsultation service. Whakarongorau has had an opportunity to feedback on the draft service specifications and has been invited to put

themselves forward as a potential provider of the service.

Appendix 1: Biography of Roger Sowry

Roger Sowry, Chair Whakarongorau Aotearoa Board



Roger is a private consultant, experienced director and a former MP and Cabinet Minister.

With a 15-year career in Parliament holding portfolios such as Social Welfare and Health, experience as the Chief Executive of Arthritis New Zealand and a partner at Saunders Unsworth, Roger brings a wealth of knowledge to the Board of Whakarongorau Aotearoa.

He also chairs the board of NZX listed telecommunications company, Vital. Roger currently is a Director and Deputy Chair of NZ Healthcare and is a chartered fellow of the Institute of Directors.