

**Submission re the  
HWNZ Investment Plan Prioritisation Criteria  
by the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists**

**June 2010**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Health Workforce New Zealand Investment Plan Prioritisation Criteria.

**Perspective on the Paper**

We welcome this document as an opportunity for a considered approach to planning for investment in the health workforce in New Zealand. We welcome the reference on page three to the potential of the allied health disciplines to contribute uniquely to achieving, better, sooner, and more convenient services. We also appreciate that it identifies the need for development in aged care, mental health, and mental and physical rehabilitations – all areas in which psychologists can have a strong role in promoting patient health, wellbeing, and function, and contributing to more efficient and effective services.

However, we note that, despite this awareness of the potential contribution of psychology and allied health, the *Methodological Assumptions* section refers only to funding strategies for medical and nursing staff. There is no mention of allied health staff or any other staff groups. As these methodological assumptions must (if they are meaningful) drive the funding model, the absence of recognition of any disciplines other than medicine and nursing in this section will limit any ability for it to address a strengthening of the workforce outside of the medical and nursing workforce, and, for some disciplines may reduce any current contribution to training.

In effect, while the second point in the *A-priori Assumptions* section refers to the current allocation as being historical and not reflective of the current and future realities, the current set of methodological assumptions appears to function more to maintain and potentially strengthen the status quo than to change it.

The paper anticipates the expansion of a generically trained health workforce in New Zealand. It is our belief that the physical and mental health needs of the New Zealand public will be most comprehensively met by the development of both more specialist expertise and staff working skilfully in more generic roles. The College is keen to be involved in enhancing the development of both the specialist and the generalist workforce.

## **Recommendation**

We recommend that:

1. A point is added to the A-priori Assumptions section indicating that it is recognised that a wide variety of kinds of staff, including allied health staff, will be needed to respond to New Zealand's future health needs.
2. At least one point be added to Methodological Assumptions section to outline for funding strategies for Allied Health professions.

The NZ College of Clinical Psychologists and, we feel confident, the psychological profession as a whole, would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the information gathering initiative proposed in the document.

## **Relevant Previous Documentation**

Earlier this year, the New Zealand Psychologists Board, in conjunction with the NZCCP, New Zealand Psychological Society, the University Professional Psychology Programmes, and the DHB Psychology Professional Leaders, submitted a paper to Health Workforce New Zealand regarding supporting improved provision of Psychology Interns (final year trainees – typically in their sixth or seventh year of University study) in the health sector<sup>1</sup>. This document could serve as a useful basis for considering funding strategies in relation to Psychology Interns and may have some relevance to other allied health disciplines.

## **Contribution and Criticality of Psychologists**

While less obvious within the health system than some other disciplines, psychologists frequently provide a contribution that is of high criticality and contributes significantly to health and wellbeing. In mental health, this often involves working intensely with many of the most therapeutically challenging, and often the most at-risk clients. In physical health it often involves providing a different kind of input with high (and often inappropriate) service users, leading to more effective treatment and less wastage of service resource. This has also been recognised by the New Zealand health services in that the number of psychologists within mental health services in DHBs has increased by 30% and the number within physical health services has increased by 80% in a recent five year period<sup>2</sup>. That this expansion happened over a period of relatively little growth in staff numbers in many health sectors indicates a recognition of the potential value of these services.

Psychologists also have a significant role in the development of a workforce with more generic skills. For example, initiatives of Te Pou to increase the abilities of many types of mental health staff to develop stronger “talk therapy” skills, requires not only training but also mentorship and support for trainees to apply the skills in their setting. Psychologists are frequently called on to be these mentors and assist with this transfer to achieve a more psychosocially skilled general workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Psychologists Board (2011). Improving support for the training of psychology interns in the health sector: A report for Health Workforce New Zealand. Wellington, Author.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, M.W. (2008). Psychologists in physical health services in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 37, 50-54.

More generally, a majority of the disorders identified under point b of the *Government Health Priorities* have a very substantial psychosocial and behavioural component for both reducing the incidence and decreasing the functional disability and social cost they cause. It is also widely recognised that psychological and behavioural change technologies may, by offering something that is quite distinct from “business as usual” within many health services, offer some powerful opportunities for improving service efficacy and reducing inappropriate service use.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this document. We trust you will find these comments of value. Please do not hesitate to contact the College if we can be of any further assistance.