

29 March 2021



**Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern**  
Prime Minister

Parliament Buildings  
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**By email:** [J.Ardern@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:J.Ardern@ministers.govt.nz)

And, by copy to

**Hon Min Andrew Little and Dr Ashley Bloomfield**

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Tēnā koe Prime Minister

### **ED Volumes**

The members of General Practice New Zealand (GPNZ), and many in the wider primary care community, were dismayed to hear your assertion on The AM Show with Duncan Garner this morning that many people are ending up in our Emergency Departments ‘because they haven’t been treated properly in primary care’.

The hard work and exceptional commitment of our primary care professionals is widely recognised, and it is a real concern that your remarks about the current pressure in our hospitals may be interpreted as a failure of their efforts.

Our whole health system is stressed, as Minister Little acknowledged last week when he outlined the next steps in our planned health system reform. Our general practice teams and their colleagues across primary care have played a huge role in our COVID-19 response. Many are exhausted and deflated, often struggling with less resource and remuneration than their hospital counterparts.

They are also eager for the system changes that will finally put the focus where it needs to be – in primary care. It is absolutely true that far too many people end up in ED who should not be there, but that is a consequence of our flawed system, and not the standard of care people receive in the community. Furthermore, in some communities, economic hardship drives people to choose ED care as a first option, despite long waiting times.

Our primary care teams can do much more, but they need to be equipped to do so, with more workforce capacity, better IT systems, and a funding model that will allow affordable, convenient and equitable access to first contact services. Crucially, our people are looking forward to the culture shift that will enable them to build on existing innovation in prevention and population wellbeing across Aotearoa, so they can better deliver on the vision of equity, partnership, excellence, sustainability and whānau-centred care.

We sincerely hope that you will be able to find opportunities in the coming weeks to celebrate the work of our primary care staff and to correct any misconception about the inadequacy of their efforts.

We would very much like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss further, or to arrange a visit to a general practice at a time to suit.

Ngā mihi o te aranga

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Lowe', with a large, sweeping underline.

Dr Jeff Lowe,  
Chair GPNZ and GP Karori Medical Centre