



## **Health Sector Update 2: Impacts of Middle East conflict on the health system**

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Issued by: Ministry of Health

### **Purpose of this update**

This update provides health sector stakeholders with information on the health system impacts of the Middle East conflict and the Government's Fuel Response Plan. It can be shared with providers wider networks.

### **Current situation**

- New Zealand remains in Phase 1 of the Government's Fuel Response Plan. The situation is being closely monitored and there are no fuel restrictions in place.
- Alongside other government agencies, the Ministry of Health is developing a plan to confirm what the different phases of the Government's Fuel Response Plan will look like for the health system.

### **What the health sector is doing**

- The Ministry of Health is working with Health New Zealand, Pharmac and other agencies to identify and manage emerging risks to the health system. Our priority is making sure people can continue to access the health services, medicines and medical devices they need.
- The Ministry has engaged with health sector groups to gather information and insights. This is informing our planning and advice to the Government.
- The Ministry is developing indicators to monitor health system impacts and support timely decision-making as the situation evolves.

### **What providers are seeing**

- Providers have told us they are seeing increasing service delivery costs due to fuel price and supply-chain pressures.
- They are also reporting higher distribution and delivery costs affecting services reliant on medicines, medical devices and consumables.
- Providers have also expressed concern about growing impacts on patients and whānau, and some have reported an uptick in missed appointments. They are reporting that vulnerable populations and rural communities are particularly affected.

## **What providers are already doing**

- Providers have told us that they are supporting access to care through practical measures such as promotion of digital services (where appropriate) and increased use of mobile clinics.
- They have also told us they are reducing fuel use where possible without compromising care. This includes clustering community outreach services to reduce travel and concentrating administrative tasks so staff can work from home one day per week.
- Some providers have told us they are reviewing how service provision may be adapted if cost pressures continue, including options for delivering services remotely where appropriate. Several providers have activated, or are revisiting, Business Continuity Plans developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure service continuity.

## **What the Government's Fuel Response Plan would look like for the health sector**

- In Phase 2, providers would ensure patients are aware of digital options for service delivery (e.g. phone or video appointments) so they can choose to use these where appropriate. Providers would also reduce fuel use where possible while maintaining patient access and continuity of care.
- In later phases, providers would look to expand digital options further so that – where appropriate – patients can access care without needing to travel. At the same time, health providers would make changes to service delivery to conserve fuel while continuing to provide face-to-face care where needed.
- Our expectation is that, across all phases of the Plan, most or all health services will be prioritised for fuel allocation.

## **What this means for health services and patients**

- Health services and medicines remain available.
- Most health care continues to be provided in person.
- Patients may choose to access care remotely (e.g. phone or video appointments) where appropriate.

## **Next steps**

- Health entities and providers are continuing to plan so that they are able to reduce their reliance on fuel while maintaining access to care.
- The Ministry is continuing to work with Health New Zealand and other agencies to monitor impacts and manage risks to health care delivery and access.