

2021 Parliamentary Review into the National Cervical Screening Programme: response and next steps

The 2021 Parliamentary Review into the National Cervical Screening Programme

Under Part 4A, Section 112O, of the Health Act 1956, a Parliamentary Review Committee (PRC) is required to be established every three years to review the National Cervical Screening Programme. This is the fourth review.

The Minister of Health, Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall appointed Dr Heather Came (Chair), Dr Georgina McPherson and Ms Liane Penney to the 2021 Parliamentary Review Committee.

The Committee notes that while there has been steady improvement in cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates since the programme's inception, the last few years have seen results plateau. The report notes that business as usual will maintain the current inequities and enable institutional racism and further breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Committee emphasises that if Aotearoa wants equitable outcomes from the screening programme, we need to value the lives of the people involved and provide a free screening and treatment pathway. This remains an overarching message from the 2021 PRC.

The report provides practical recommendations for continuous quality and equity improvements, with a view to further reduce the incidence and mortality of cervical cancer in Aotearoa, particularly for Māori and Pacific people who currently carry an inequitable burden of cervical cancer.

There are 31 recommendations in total, across the areas of accessibility, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, elimination of cervical cancer, integration, monitoring and evaluation, co-governance and clinical governance, clinical quality assurance in colposcopy services, and workforce capacity and capability.

All of these recommendations have been made in the context of the imminent transition from cervical smears to human papillomavirus (HPV) self-testing, later this year.

The aim of the report's recommendations is to create a more integrated system across the NCSP pathway that improves accessibility, addresses ethnic inequities in healthcare outcomes, and ensures that the health sector meets its responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The 2021 Parliamentary Review into the National Cervical Screening Programme can be read in full [here](#).

The Action Plan

Te Whatu Ora accepts the recommendations in the report but notes that our ability to implement some recommendations – particularly recommendation 3 (to provide a free cervical screening programme) – is dependent on securing additional funding. The NCSP is continually working to identify opportunities to secure this additional funding.

Now that the report has been published, we will undertake a consultation and engagement process with our partners across the health system, including with key external representatives. The purpose of this engagement process will be to finalise an action plan for implementing the recommendations in the report.

In partnership with Te Aka Whai Ora, the NCSP has developed an interim draft action plan for addressing the recommendations in the report, which will support the consultation and engagement process.

This action plan will be finalised later this year. In the meantime, we are focused on ensuring that relevant recommendations are progressed within the HPV screening roll out.