

Education and Workforce Committee's Inquiry into student accommodation

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For more information please contact:
Jane Murray
NMDHB Public Health Service
Email: jane.murray@nmdhb.govt.nz
Phone: (03) 543 7805

Submitter details

1. Nelson Marlborough Health (Nelson Marlborough District Health Board) (NMH) is a key organisation involved in the health and wellbeing of the people within Te Tau Ihu. NMH appreciates the opportunity to comment from a public health perspective on the Education and Workforce Committee's *Inquiry into student accommodation*.
2. NMH makes this submission in recognition of its responsibilities to improve, promote and protect the health of people and communities under the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000 and the Health Act 1956.
3. This submission sets out particular matters of interest and concern to NMH.

Specific Comments

4. NMH supports the purpose and terms of reference of the Inquiry in relation to the difficulties and lack of support students have been facing in a sector being increasingly exposed as under-regulated and unfit for purpose as noted in the background document.
5. Whilst Nelson Marlborough region has a polytechnic, the region does not have a university and many young people will leave the district for education. NMH has concerns for the wellbeing of some of our young people who move away from their pre-existing support networks of family and friends. 70% of students cite friends & family as being the most important factors in contributing to their wellbeing.¹ For many students, moving into accommodation at university will be the first time they are learning to live independently and have self-determination as they learn who to stick to a routine, prepare meals, and juggle domestic commitments like food shopping, cleaning and laundry.
6. Higher education is viewed as an important setting for health promotion action both locally and internationally. Higher education institutions have great potential to positively influence their campus communities and geographical communities. This can be through creating healthy working, learning and living environments; increasing the profile of wellbeing and public health issues within teaching and

¹ UPP Foundation, A Report by Student Minds, the UK's Student mental health charity https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/student_living_collaborating_to_support_mental_health_in_university_accommodation.pdf

research; and developing partnerships and leadership opportunities within and outside campus.^{2,3}

7. The demographics of the student population are changing and this is of relevance to the provision of mental healthcare. The numbers of young people in higher education have expanded and they have become more socially and culturally diverse. There have been increasing numbers of students drawn from backgrounds with historically low rates of participation in higher education and growing numbers of international students. Social changes such as the withdrawal of financial support, higher rates of family breakdown and, more recently, economic recession are all having an impact on the well-being of some students and other young people.⁴
8. The *Kei Te Pai?* report⁵ surveyed nearly 2,000 students on their lived experiences in relation to mental health. The study was the first of its kind on tertiary students' mental health in New Zealand, and follows similar studies conducted by student organisations internationally. Adjusting to tertiary study, feelings of loneliness and academic anxiety have been identified as major triggering factors of depression, stress and anxiety amongst students.
9. NMH recommends that the Pastoral Care Code ensures the following:
 - a. that each tertiary institution takes responsibility for a coordinated, joined up approach with the Halls of Residence that includes best practice guidelines, clear lines of delegation, communication and authority.
 - b. that protocols are developed with mental health providers to ensure students at risk receive help.
 - c. all staff at Halls of Residence are provided with basic mental health training and how to respond in an emergency or sudden death. This includes staff in the cleaning or security roles who may pick up on students in distress or experiencing mental health difficulties at any time of the day.
 - d. that staff are provided with good psychosocial support and pastoral care as well.
 - e. that peer support training on mental wellbeing strategies and suicide prevention is made available to all residents. Ideally, each resident should be

² https://www.who.int/healthy_settings/about/en/

³ Thorpe Dr Anna; Collie Carmen (2016) South Island Tertiary Health and Wellbeing survey

⁴ Royal College of Psychiatrists (2011) *Mental health of students in higher education*
https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/college-reports/college-report-cr166.pdf?sfvrsn=d5fa2c24_2

⁵ New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (2019) *Kei Te Pai?* [https://teu.ac.nz/news/student-mental-health#:~:text=Adjusting%20to%20tertiary%20study%2C%20feelings,of%20Students'%20Associations%20\(NZUS A\)](https://teu.ac.nz/news/student-mental-health#:~:text=Adjusting%20to%20tertiary%20study%2C%20feelings,of%20Students'%20Associations%20(NZUS A))

informally buddied with a resident they trust and who is trustworthy e.g. a wing-man strategy that uses a mental health support system to help each other⁶

10. NMH acknowledges that students in other forms of accommodation may also be at risk. Therefore NMH recommends there is a greater emphasis placed on how students are prepared to manage their own and others' wellbeing prior to living away from home.⁷ This could be done through secondary schools or in the preparatory material from tertiary institutions.
11. NMH notes that the interim Pastoral Care Code is for domestic students. NMH recommends that the permanent Pastoral Care Code either covers both domestic and international students or the International Pastoral Care Code is subsequently revised so it aligns with the new permanent code.

Conclusion:

12. The Education (Pastoral Care) Amendment Act 2019 goes some way to addressing the needs of students in university accommodation. This Inquiry will, it is hoped, lead to improved safety and wellbeing for students and staff members of student accommodation. NMH welcomes the refinement of a permanent Pastoral Care Code.
13. NMH thanks the Education and Workforce Committee for the opportunity to comment on the terms of this Inquiry.
14. NMH **does not wish to be heard** in support of its submission.

Yours sincerely



Peter Bramley
Chief Executive
peter.bramley@nmhs.govt.nz

⁶ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-lgbti-people/wingman-for-gay-guys-by-gay-guys/the-wingman-toolkit>

⁷ Education Review Office (March 2016) [Wellbeing for Success: A Resource for Schools](#), New Zealand Government