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Health Quality and Safety Commission

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Tēnā koe

New Health and Disability System Safety Strategy (the Strategy)

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetist (ANZCA), which includes the Faculty of Pain Medicine and Chapter of Perioperative Medicine, warmly welcomes this Strategy to improve quality and safety of the country's health and disability system. The Strategy is viewed positively by members, professional advisors and educators as a modern, systems-oriented safety framework which reflects the direction of international thinking on healthcare quality over the past decade. We take this opportunity to pass on comments about the strengths of the Strategy as well as some limitations, the most important of which is the lack of explicit consideration of environmental factors, including climate change. We trust these observations will be useful in informing subsequent development and implementation of the plan.

Strengths

The alignment with contemporary safety science and the WHO Global Patient Safety Action Plan is welcomed: systems-thinking, patient partnership, workforce engagement and wellbeing, learning from harm (though not as much about learning from success as in Safety 2 thinking), psychological safety and collaboration across organisational boundaries reflect much of the international conversation over the last decade. The analogy of the hīnaki - the tuna net capturing the entire system - is well chosen to illustrate the collaboration needed between everyone.

The Strategy clearly and concisely identifies the vision, guiding principles and focus areas, providing a valuable framework for the development of the detailed system safety action plan that will follow, according to the timeline indicated.

Concerns and limitations

- *High-level*

As a high-level document, there is a risk of principles not being translated into practical priorities and behaviours. The Strategy's value will depend on the extent to which clinicians and managers are empowered to act.

- *Governance and leadership*

While the Strategy repeatedly invokes collaboration, collective responsibility and distributed leadership, figure 2 (p10) suggests that much of the implementation is centred on national agencies, particularly the Ministry of Health and HQSC, with service delivery organisations

appearing more as components of the system than as active partners in system leadership. It is important that those delivering care day to day - hospitals, primary care, professional groups and clinicians - have sufficient visibility within proposed governance structures.

- *Targets*

The strategy presents access targets, including cancer treatment and planned care, as indicators of system safety concerns. Targets can be useful, but they can also distort priorities and create unintended consequences, particularly in the complex environments in which health care is resourced and delivered. We question the value of targets as an indicator of safety.

- *Environmental sustainability and climate change*

The strategy mentions “sustainably meeting consumer, whanau and community health needs” but is silent about the current threats of global warming. Climate change is increasingly recognised by the UN and many others as the single biggest threat to the future health of the community (Rockström 2025; Swinburn 2019) and is already directly and indirectly contributing to serious health consequences in Aotearoa New Zealand (RSNZ 2017). The health sector's contribution to global warming must also be considered.

It is not plausible to have a whole of system safety strategy that is not designed for adaptation and response to climate change. ANZCA strongly recommends extending the remit of this strategy beyond the Ministry of Health |Te Manatū Hauora, to all Ministries to ensure a whole of government approach to safety that avoids the risks and costs of compartmentalising health, housing, education, justice, and the environment.

Conclusion

ANZCA looks forward to using the Strategy to influence education, professional practice and broader advocacy, particularly around sustainability and health equity. In summary, ANZCA is optimistic about the Strategy making a real difference to effecting safe, people-centred health care in a system that is designed to continuously improve quality and safety in the health and disability system and beyond.

Nāku noa, nā

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Cc

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