

Briefing

Publication of Think Tank paper: The future of primary and community responses to mental health and substance use needs

Date due to MO:	12/03/2026	Action required by:	24/03/2026
Security level:	UNCLASSIFIED	Briefing number:	BN2026-004
To:	Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health		
Copy to:	Stephanie Buick, Principal Advisor System Planning & Accountability, Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora		

Contact for Telephone Discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Karen Orsborn	Chief Executive	
Sonya Russell	Director, Mental Health and Addiction Sector Leadership	

Minister's Office to Complete

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Approved | ☐ Decline | ☐ Noted |
| ☐ Needs change | ☐ Seen | ☐ Overtaken by event |
| ☐ See Minister's note | ☐ Withdrawn | |

Comment:

Publication of Think Tank paper: The future of primary and community responses to mental health and substance use needs

Security level:	UNCLASSIFIED	Date:	12/03/2026
To:	Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health		

Purpose of report

1. On 24 March 2026, Te Hīringa Mahara – Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (the Commission) will publish the attached paper, *The future of primary and community responses to mental health and substance use needs*. This briefing provides an overview of this paper.

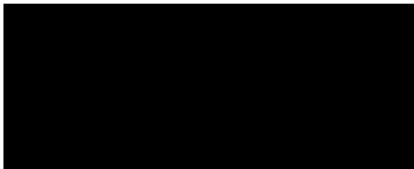
Summary

2. The Commission hosted a 'Think Tank' workshop to discuss the future of primary responses to mental health and substance use (MHA) needs. This discussion followed the release of our final monitoring report on Access and Choice, published in April 2025. Senior system leaders from a range of organisations were invited to participate in a discussion about the future of primary responses to mental health and substance use needs.
3. The attached paper summarises the key themes that were discussed in the session in relation to the key questions: what do we think the primary care landscape should look like in 10 years time, and how do we get there?
4. Key messages about what's needed in the future for the primary care landscape to support mental health and substance use needs were: strong support for the continuation of the Access and Choice funding and approach; the need for local leadership, flexibility to provide holistic support, and greater integration to meet needs; and the need for changes to funding approaches, greater evaluation of impacts, and focus on system enablers to bring about these improvements.
5. Subject to minor editorial and design changes, the paper will be published on our website on 24 March 2026.
6. This paper supports the request by the Minister of Health to the Public Health Advisory Committee (PHAC) to focus on the future of primary care. We are seeking your support to share the paper with Minister Brown and request a meeting with him. We will also share the paper with PHAC.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| a) | Note the attached paper will be published on 24 March 2026. | Yes No |
| b) | Agree to share this briefing and paper with the Minister of Health. | Yes No |
| c) | Note we intend to release this briefing under our proactive release policy. | Yes No |



Karen Orsborn
Chief Executive
Date: 12/03/2026

Hon Matt Doocey
Minister for Mental Health
Date:



Discussion

Background

7. Following the publication of the final Access and Choice monitoring report in April 2025, the Commission hosted a 'Think Tank' workshop of senior system leaders to discuss the future of primary responses to MHA needs. This was intended to be blue-sky thinking beyond the existing Access and Choice programme.
8. Access to timely primary care services is a priority for the Minister of Health and he has asked the PHAC to focus on the future of primary care. The work aims to identify opportunities to strengthen primary care, to deliver population health outcomes effectively and efficiently, while ensuring improved and faster access for all New Zealanders. The committee expects to complete its advice by July 2026.

Key messages

9. A range of important insights were explored about what a future primary care landscape that can respond to peoples' mental health and substance use issues needs to look like. There was strong support for the need for Access and Choice funding and approach as part of this future system. Other components of an effective landscape included:
 - Community oriented, locally-led and flexible
 - Integrated across key boundaries – both horizontally with community services and vertically with specialist services
 - Access to primary care needs to be fast and accessible
 - Mental health and physical health needs are intertwined, and responses need to be holistic with a wellbeing focus
 - Support empowers people and their whānau
 - A greater focus on social determinants could reduce demand for primary and community health services
10. Further work is required to determine the pathway to reach this vision. It will need to include:
 - Funding and commissioning approaches that support change
 - Evaluating impact of existing and new services
 - Recruit and upskill a broad workforce
 - Prioritise the enabling systems
 - Build from existing strengths and innovation, including refinement of Access and Choice.



11. This paper provides a useful foundation that we, and others, can draw from in advocating for a primary care system that supports an effective Mental Health and Addiction continuum of care.

Consultation

12. Feedback from members of the Think Tank discussion is reflected in the paper.

Communications

13. To promote discussion and debate on the role of primary and community responses contributing to people's wellbeing and holistic health needs, the Commission will publish thought leadership pieces in sector media. The paper will be published on our website and shared within our networks and directly with key stakeholders, including the PHAC.
14. Karen Orsborn, Chief Executive, will be the spokesperson for any media interest. We will keep your office informed of media activity.

Next Steps

15. The final publication-ready paper will be shared with your office prior to publication, and subject to minor editorial and design changes, will be published on our website on 24 March 2026.
16. This paper supports the request by the Minister of Health to the PHAC to focus on the future of primary care. We are seeking your support to share the paper with Minister Brown and request a meeting with him. We will also share the paper with PHAC.

Attachments

- Appendix A Think Tank paper: The future of primary and community responses to mental health and substance use needs
- Appendix B Comms and engagement plan – Minister's office

ENDS