

Kia ora,

It was a personal pleasure to attend the 2018 conference in Rotorua, and to participate in the panel discussion 'seeking equity for midwifery' and hear the views of midwives.

Maternity has been identified as a strategic priority area for the Ministry of Health with the development of a Maternity work programme, which will be presented to the Minister of Health by the end of this calendar year.

The Ministry is committed to an approach to this programme that is mana-enhancing and builds strong and enduring relationships.

This means time must be taken to make connections to both place and people, which is important to uphold the mana of everyone involved. How we work together is as important as what we work on.

In July 2018, a whole of maternity system workshop was convened by the Ministry. Leading up to that workshop and afterward I have been continuing to have discussions about where systems supporting maternity and midwifery have come from, where we are now, and where we need to head toward.

The Maternity work programme will cover many areas of action across the whole of the maternity system, and will include actions covering both core and community midwifery actions.

In our discussions to date with NZCOM governors, staff and members (both core and community midwives) over the past four months we have seen and heard your anger, frustration, exhaustion, and sadness as well as your commitment, integrity, desire for engagement, humour and professionalism.

At the conference, I apologised on behalf of the Ministry for the way in which we handled the co-design work and the people that worked so hard for it and with it.

On reflection, it seems clear this prevented NZCOM and their members from discussing the co-design framework and working positively together and with the Ministry on advancing work to maintain and strengthen the midwifery model of care.

The recommendations of the co-design process have now been published on the Ministry website, and these will be an integral part of the maternity work programme.

Recommendations like the establishment of a national midwifery organisation, the establishment of a national primary maternity agreement and changing the payment approach will be progressed as part of the Ministry's maternity work programme.

While the programme covers activity beginning in the 2018/19 financial year, the Ministry has heard a clear message from the midwifery profession that there are workforce shortages that are impacting now.

We are actively working with Health Workforce New Zealand, District Health Boards, NZCOM governance, management and members to address this.

Both the Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield and I would also like to acknowledge the announcement at the NZCOM AGM of the impending retirement of Karen Guilliland, CEO of NZCOM. There can be no question Karen has always wanted to ensure the best outcomes and supports for midwives, mothers and babies, and NZCOM members have been better off for this over the 28 years of her leadership in midwifery.

I look forward to working with you all. It is important for you to know your views are heard and respected and will be incorporated into our work. Together, we remain focused on ensuring improved access to safe, integrated, high quality services that meet the needs of mother and baby and work better for midwives in addressing hours of work, workload, income and support.

Nga mihi.