

Dr Rob Beaglehole appointed to establish New National Public Health Advocacy Team for DHBs

Leaders from all of New Zealand's District Health Boards have agreed to establish a new national function to help eliminate health inequities, and improve the sustainability of the health system, and make it easier for New Zealanders to live longer and healthier lives.

The aim is to ensure that we do more across the country, to provide an environment in which all New Zealanders are more easily able to make healthy choices. Smart approaches to public health policy, regulation, and practice applied nationally and with greater consistency across our communities, will save lives and improve wellbeing, preventing illness that puts pressure on our health services.

With almost 10,000 premature deaths every year from unhealthy diet and unhealthy weight, and New Zealand ranking as the third most obese population of the 36 countries in the OECD¹, many health professionals, community leaders and policy makers are convinced there must be a better way to make more of a difference. There is.

The small specialist team will advocate for and provide expertise to apply the best evidence from around the world about the changes that will make the biggest difference for New Zealanders, with an initial focus on achieving a healthier food environment and reducing alcohol related harm. The work will include co-ordination with DHB public health leaders to ensure DHB food and drink policies are strengthened, consistent, and reflective of best practice.

This approach will complement the work of the Health Promotion Agency nationally, and the good practice that exists within District Health Boards, regional Public Health Units, and partner agencies, and provide a valuable supportive resource for policy makers and leaders.

The Northern Regional Alliance is hosting the new team under the leadership of Dr Nick Chamberlain, CEO of Northland District Health Board and lead DHC Chief Executive for Public Health.

A steering group with expert support drawn from across New Zealand is being established over the coming weeks to help guide and advise on the priorities and work programme. The National DHB Chairs and CEOs have asked Vui Mark Gosche, Board Chair of Counties Manukau District Health Board to act as the Chair sponsor for the work in this area.

I am delighted to confirm that Dr Rob Beaglehole has been appointed to lead the new function's establishment and development. Rob will be taking up a secondment to undertake the role beginning in April 2020.

Rob Beaglehole is a dentist and public health specialist, and has trained in New Zealand and the UK. He currently works as the public health advocate in Nelson Marlborough District Health Board and is the spokesperson for the New Zealand Dental Association. Rob previously served as a senior political advisor to the Minister of Health and has worked internationally for the World Health Organisation and World Dental Federation, in the areas of oral health, tobacco control and sugar consumption.

¹ The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development is made up of New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Japan, Israel, South Korea, Turkey, and 25 European nations.