



10 August 2018

Our ref: HMB18-461

Jane Chambers
Ministry of Health
PO box 5013
WELLINGTON 6140

By email: immunisation@moh.govt.nz

Dear Ms Chambers

Discussion document on the best time to start the Annual Influenza Immunisation Programme

Thank you for providing the College with the opportunity to comment on the discussion document for consideration on the best time to start the Annual Influenza Immunisation Programme.

Introduction to general practice and the College

General practice is the medical specialty that treats patients: with the widest variety of conditions; with the greatest range of severity (from minor to terminal); from the earliest presentation to the end; and with the most inseparable intertwining of the biomedical and the psychosocial. General practitioners (GPs) treat patients of all ages, from neonates to elderly, across the course of their lives.

GPs comprise almost 40 percent of New Zealand's specialist workforce and their professional body, the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (the College), is the largest medical college in the country. The College provides training and ongoing professional development for GPs and rural hospital generalists, and sets standards for general practice. The College has a commitment to embed the three principles (participation, partnership and protection) of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) across its work, and to achieving health equity in New Zealand.

Health equity is the absence of avoidable or remediable differences in health outcomes and access to health services among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically (WHO). To achieve health equity, we advocate for:

- A greater focus on the social determinants of health (including labour, welfare, education, housing, and the environment).
- Funding and support to sustain the development of a GP workforce of sufficient capacity to meet population need for access to quality primary medical care, particularly in rural and high need areas.
- Sustained focus on measures to reduce smoking and to increase healthy food options for low-income families.
- Improved integration of primary, community, and secondary care health and social services which ensures the provision of high quality services.
- Universally accessible free primary health care for children and low-income families, because health inequities begin early and compound over the life course.
- A review of the funding model for primary care to ensure that resourcing is allocated equitably across diverse populations with differing needs.

Submission

The College supports moving the start date of the Annual Influenza Immunisation Programme to 1 April each year. This would allow pre-planning in general practices for the vaccination delivery and promotion of the vaccine availability. The College has consulted the member GPs and most of our members are very supportive of shifting the Programme start date to 1 April. The members agree that the later start date would allow for optimal vaccine effectiveness during the peak of the influenza season. However, some members did note that the start date of April coincides with school holiday / Easter during which the practices experience staff shortage. The campaign could inform the public not to expect to be able to attend their GP immediately after the start date.

We hope you find our submission helpful. Should you require any further information or clarification please contact the College's policy team at policy@rnzcgp.org.nz.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Thorn
Manager – Strategic Policy