

3 September 2024

Hon Mark Mitchell  
Minister of Police  
Private Bag 18888  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160

[M.Mitchell@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:M.Mitchell@ministers.govt.nz)

Tēnā koe Minister

### **Serious concerns about rapid Police withdrawal from mental health responses**

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (MHF) are deeply concerned by the pace and quick staging of year-one of Police withdrawal to mental health crises [announced](#) last week, and in particular the publication of firm dates for transition by Police but with no corresponding health plan.

Police withdrawal will start to take place as early as November 2024 and yet the MHF have not seen a *tangible* response from Health New Zealand about how the health system will be able to fill the void in acute mental health crisis presentations given unprecedented demand and the severe workforce shortages, other than a commitment "to put a robust operational plan in place".<sup>1</sup> Two months is not sufficient time for the health system to adapt and meet workforce challenges.

At this point the MHF do not believe Police can start to withdraw without peoples' safety being compromised. Mental health is an issue the public are concerned about, and mistakes in the handling of this issue would not only be tragic but draw public attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Health New Zealand / Te Whatu Ora Media statement, 30 August 2024. [Health agencies working with Police on rebalancing roles for mental health responses – Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora](#)

The MHF are frequently called upon by the media to speak to this issue and our bottom line is that while we fully support the proposal to move towards a health-led response to mental health crisis we estimate it will take at least five years of health workforce building until Police can fully scale back their role. We have stressed the importance of Police not making changes to its operating model before an effective alternative is in place.

**The MHF urges Police to work with Health New Zealand as they establish a detailed, adequate and transparent health response – including funding and staffing – to absorb the impact of the year-one Police step-back. By publishing target dates for Police withdrawal without details of the corresponding health initiatives, confusion and concern has already been raised in the mental health sector and the minds of the public.** If an adequate health response is not viable ahead of each planned phase, we ask that you delay Police withdrawal until an alternative is in place, otherwise vulnerable people and their families will fall through the cracks of a disjointed health response.

**The MHF urges you and Minister Doocoy to ensure the overall transition process is exceptionally well planned and coordinated, fully transparent to the public and the mental health sector and implemented on a gradual scale.** The MHF have spoken with the Minister for Mental Health to seek his assurance, and we acknowledge your comment that the shift requires a careful, measured approach. However, to create confidence, this needs to be communicated through concrete health measures before any Police withdrawal dates are published.

**The MHF asks that you and Minister Doocoy seek the advice and input of the mental health sector to test whether the alternatives that are being developed are workable.** The MHF is available to meet with you and is here to offer support and advice to your office and Police as we strive towards a common goal to ensure everybody can be safe, feel safe and get the support they need to be mentally well.

Mauri tū, mauri ora,

**Shaun Robinson**

Chief Executive