



5 October 2020

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Tēnā koutou

### **Northern Region ICU Services**

We have received your letter dated 17 September 2020 within which you raise concerns regarding the preparedness of Northern region ICU services. We would like to acknowledge the genuine concerns you have raised regarding general ICU preparedness whilst clinical teams are coping with the additional workload associated with the current Auckland community outbreak, including the care and support of patients and their whanau who have required ICU admission.

We understand work done previously in the initial COVID response earlier this year established a regional understanding of a level of readiness including establishing local and regional processes, training plans for additional workforce and plans to establish sufficient negative pressure capacity all of which supported an ability to escalate regional capacity in the event of a surge. Thank you for your leadership in undertaking this work.

While we note there were extensive discussions during the March COVID response and assurances about contingency and escalation plans given by your services at that time, we can understand that over time these need to be refreshed and reviewed in line with advancing international evidence and with the general principles now being applied across the northern Region.

We would encourage you to use the existing regional ICU network, and the mechanisms and communication processes you have in place to routinely monitor and manage regional ICU capacity and to establish a plan for regional ICU bed management. Work has already been done to establish regional principles to support the transfer of patients between MIF and quarantine facilities and we suggest you use a similar approach to formally document the agreed ICU transfer principles and processes for the on-going management of ICU capacity on both a business as usual and surge basis. A copy of those regional principles is attached for your reference. Please advise if you need support to do this.

We would expect you as a group of clinical leaders to also refresh your established plans to provide sufficient medical and nursing staff to support changing levels of COVID and other demand. There is a national framework, supported by national funding, currently being developed to provide standardised update training to additional ICU nurses and we would anticipate that as clinical leaders of the service you are being briefed on these developments through your national networks and local DHB management processes. Again, if you believe you need regional support in some way to achieve this please let us know.

With regards to the availability of negative pressure rooms, we are not assured that the data in your letter is the most up to date available. However, we do acknowledge that each DHB has different levels of available negative pressure capacity and there is a need for further capacity to be made available. Work is already underway to undertake some planned upgrades required to improve provision of negative pressure capacity in critical care.

We welcome your on-going work in supporting our regional critical care capacity and we support your intent to finalise a regional plan that gives us the following assurances:

- There is a regional ICU network in place and appropriate reporting established to enable daily assessment of capacity in real time
- There is agreed regional transfer protocols and principles formally documented
- There are formal plans in place to ensure sufficient medical and nursing staff to respond to changing demands associated with COVID surges
- There is an accurate understanding of negative pressure capacity in each DHB and timeframes to any outstanding upgrades to be completed.

We encourage you to work with your DHB management colleagues to get this work supported and progressed and given the urgency due to on-going risk, we would like you to send this plan to Joanne Brown [email address redacted] by 16 October 2020 so this plan can be reviewed by the Regional Provider Capacity Response Group before being provided to us for our endorsement. Thank you again for reaching out to us.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Executive  
Northland DHB



**Margie Apa**  
Chief Executive  
Counties Manukau DHB



**Derek Wright**  
Acting Chief Executive  
Waitemata District Health Board



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