

MEDIA RELEASE

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Public Health Association says new legislation must include references to Treaty of Waitangi

The Public Health Association today told the Health Select Committee that the new Public Health Bill the committee is considering contains not one reference to Māori participation in health services.

PHA National Executive Officer, Dr Gay Keating, said this is despite references to the Treaty of Waitangi and its implication for health of Māori, in both the Local Government Act 2002 and the Health and Disability Act 2000.

“Both these Acts oblige District Health Boards and local governments to support Māori sharing in the decision making about their own health issues,” Dr Keating told the committee.

Dr Keating said that if the proposed Public Health Bill goes through as is, it will not only result in a clouded and confused approach to Māori involvement in health but it could also be seen as an instance of institutional racism about to be enshrined in government legislation.

“The Bill must recognise and respect how the Treaty of Waitangi can be used to ensure Māori lead the decisions that affect them and share in providing services to their own people. That is what the United Nations expects under the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” Dr Keating said.

“The Bill should allow iwi authorities, as well as local and regional authorities, to appoint inspectors of health, if that is what the iwi wants. Without this, we risk returning to an era where Māori were expected to passively accept decisions made outside their communities as to how best to deal with their health issues – an approach that’s been found wholly ineffective in the past.”

For more information contact:

Dr Gay Keating
National Executive Officer
Public Health Association
027 341 4708

or

For a speaker of Te Reo Māori contact:

Peter Thomas
Council member
Public Health Association

027 282 0091