

01 June 2023

Daniel Bilson
Advisor
Health Workforce Commissioning

Sent via email to: daniel.bilson@health.govt.nz and vbs@health.govt.nz

Dear Daniel,

Re: Submission to include pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in the 2024 Voluntary Bonding Scheme

The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc.) (the Guild) is a national membership organisation representing the majority of community pharmacy owners. We provide leadership on all issues affecting the sector and advocate for the business and professional interests of community pharmacy.

We would like to strongly advocate for the inclusion of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in the 2024 Voluntary Bonding Scheme (VBS), in an effort to help address severe recruitment challenges, workforce burnout and geographical shortage hotspots.

We believe the VBS could be an effective way to counter, and in some cases, reverse the urbanisation of the pharmacy workforce. Recruitment of qualified pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in rural areas has become increasingly challenging. Many advertised positions in rural areas receive few to no applications, leaving these positions vacant for prolonged periods. This leads to a shortage of pharmacy staff in rural communities, increasing the risk of compromised patient care and increasing the workload for existing staff.

The ongoing vacancy rates for established full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in rural areas are concerning. Rural areas often experience higher vacancy rates compared to urban areas, leaving critical positions unfilled and healthcare burnout a frequent occurrence. The fact that Immigration New Zealand recently added pharmacists to the Straight to Residence pathway (or "Green List") recognises that the Ministry are aware of these shortages and are actively trying to address them. However, the unequal distribution of pharmacists within Aotearoa is just as much of a barrier to equitable access as the overall shortage, as *appendix A* clearly demonstrates.

There are recruitment and attrition hotspots in rural areas (see *appendix B*), where it is more difficult to attract and retain pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, with urban areas such as Auckland and Wellington much more attractive to the workforce, as demonstrated clearly on the graph. Factors such as geographic location, age group, ethnicity, and limited access to mentoring and professional development opportunities contribute to the challenges of recruitment and retention in rural areas, further exacerbating the shortage of healthcare professionals in these regions.

Staff turnover rates, especially among recently graduated pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, are also a concern. Many newly graduated professionals leave rural areas within the first 3 to 5 years of practice due to various reasons, including limited career advancement opportunities, lack of social support, and more financially attractive local and overseas opportunities. At the moment, due

to funding constraints, the pharmacy profession does not offer many opportunities for staff financial incentives, which could be alleviated by programmes such as the VBS.

Pharmacy owners have attempted to address workforce shortages by offering continuing education, career development opportunities, and flexible working arrangements. However, these incentives alone are not enough to address the significant recruitment and retention challenges faced by rural pharmacies, and attractive financial support is required. We believe this would also be effective in attracting part-time and locum staff to rural areas, possibly incentivising them to become more permanent or full time.

Acute workforce shortages are becoming more and more prevalent across the pharmacy sector, and patient care and patient safety are becoming an issue as a result. Anecdotally pharmacists and pharmacy staff are leaving the profession due to burnout and the lack of workforce support. This puts even more pressure on those who remain in the sector.

Including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in the VBS would provide a much-needed financial incentive to encourage them to work in rural areas, which would help address the shortage of healthcare professionals in these regions. It would also demonstrate the government's commitment to supporting the pharmacy profession and make the rural health workforce more sustainable, which will lead to improved healthcare access, patient safety, and equity in rural communities, which they greatly need and deserve.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission. If you have any questions, please contact our Senior Advisory Pharmacists, Martin Lewis (martin@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8218) or Cathy Martin (cathy@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8214).

Yours sincerely,



Nicole Rickman

General Manager – Membership and Professional Services

Appendix A

Source: Pharmacy Council's Workforce Demographic Report 2022

<https://pharmacycouncil.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Workforce-Demographic-Report-2022-Final.pdf>

Auckland / Tāmaki-makaurau

1,715,600 Estimated Population 2022
1,539 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 9 pharmacist prescribers)
8.97 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Waikato

506,000 Estimated Population 2022
309 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 7 pharmacist prescribers)
6.11 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Taranaki

126,400 Estimated Population 2022
108 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 3 pharmacist prescribers)
8.54 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Manawatu-Whanganui

256,500 Estimated Population 2022
166 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 4 pharmacist prescribers)
6.47 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Tasman / Te Tai-o-Aorere

57,900 Estimated Population 2022
15 Practising pharmacists 2022
2.59 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Nelson / Whakatū

54,700 Estimated Population 2022
69 Practising pharmacists 2022
12.61 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

West Coast / Te Tai Poutini

32,700 Estimated Population 2022
16 Practising pharmacists 2022
4.89 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Northland / Te Tai Tokerau

197,900 Estimated Population 2022
129 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 1 pharmacist prescriber)
6.52 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Bay of Plenty / Te Moana-a-Toi

343,400 Estimated Population 2022
244 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 5 pharmacist prescribers)
7.11 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Gisborne / Te Tai Rāwhiti

51,500 Estimated Population 2022
34 Practising pharmacists 2022
6.60 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Hawke's Bay / Te Matau-a-Māui

181,500 Estimated Population 2022
134 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 4 pharmacist prescribers)
7.38 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Wellington / Te Whanga-nui-a-Tara

547,000 Estimated Population 2022
468 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 4 pharmacist prescribers)
8.56 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Marlborough / Te Tau Ihu o te Waka-a-Māui

51,500 Estimated Population 2022
36 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 1 pharmacist prescriber)
6.99 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Canterbury / Waitaha

649,800 Estimated Population 2022
535 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 5 pharmacist prescribers)
8.02 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Southland / Murihiku

102,700 Estimated Population 2022
67 Practising pharmacists 2022
6.52 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Otago / Ōtākou

246,700 Estimated Population 2022
248 Practising pharmacists 2022
(including 3 pharmacist prescribers)
10.05 Density (pharmacists per 10,000 people)

Across Aotearoa New Zealand

5,121,800 estimated population 2022
4,118 practising pharmacists 2022
8.04 pharmacists per 10,000 people

Appendix B

Source: Pharmacy Council's Workforce Demographic Report 2022 (p20)

<https://pharmacycouncil.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Workforce-Demographic-Report-2022-Final.pdf>

Figure 7 Practising Pharmacists per 10,000 population by District Health Board

