

The Hon Dr Shane Reti
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26 August 2024

Kia ora Hon Dr Reti

I am writing on behalf of community-led advocacy group Health Action Wānaka to seek your consideration of our request to have the Southern health region prioritised in the roll-out of new radiology funding you announced on 6 June 2024.

In that [announcement](#), you said the \$30 million funding boost would give people free access to radiology services when referred directly by their general practitioner.

In rural and semi-rural areas, it would make a profound difference if people could be referred to radiology services directly by their GP, given the often significant distances people currently have to travel to get a referral for diagnostic imaging.

For example, we've heard stories of people who live in Wānaka travelling more than three hours each way for a ten-minute appointment with a specialist in Dunedin to get a referral for diagnostic imaging. People living in our community often have to take time off work and stay overnight in Dunedin or Invercargill simply to see a specialist for a referral.

Further, if GPs have access to imaging, they will be equipped to make more informed diagnoses allowing more expeditious management of patients which may also reduce pressure on secondary services.

As you know, early diagnosis is critical in achieving optimal health outcomes so it's essential that people in our community are able to get timely access to diagnostic tools and specialist assessments.

A story of inequity

There are a number of metrics that demonstrate the inequity in access to health services in many parts of the Southern health region, and which underline why our region is deserving of prioritisation in the roll out of the radiology funding, specifically:

- *Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network's 2024 snapshot* showed **rural people are falling behind in almost every metric** they've measured so far.
- According to Te Whatu Ora data, **70 percent of people** in New Zealand **who live more than two hours from a base hospital, live in inland Otago**.
- **54% of GP referrals to specialist care were declined in the Southern DHB region** - the highest decline rate in the country in 2022. (*Quantifying and understanding the impact of unmet need on New Zealand general practice Centre for Health Systems and Technologies (CHeST), University of Otago*)
- As of April 2024, Southern's **rural practices had an average patient ratio of 1654 patients per GP**, significantly higher than the average for Southern's urban practices of 1572 per GP (*WellSouth, April 2024*), and the **recommended average ratio of 1300-1400:1** by the Royal New Zealand College of General Practice. (*WellSouth Rural Services Review Report August 2024*)
- **Large areas of the Southern region are underserved** by secondary outpatient and specialist healthcare, particularly maternity, pediatric, chemotherapy and radiology, palliative care, community pharmacists, aged care, and mental health services. (*WellSouth Rural Services Review Report August 2024*)
- The latest 2023 Census results show that in the past five years, the **Queenstown Lakes district's population has grown 22%** to 47,800 — the second-highest growth rate in the country.

While we understand that resources for healthcare are under strain, given that the additional funding for radiology is already budgeted for, we believe it is both essential and reasonable that the Southern health region be prioritised in the roll out of additional radiology funding.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request and we look forward to your timely response.

Ngā mihi

Monique Mayze
Chair, Steering Committee
Health Action Wānaka

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Attachments

Health Action Wānaka media release (June 2024)

WellSouth Rural Services Review Report (August 2024)