

MEDIA RELEASE

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HEALTH ACTION WĀNAKA CALLS FOR FASTER AND FREE RADIOLOGY SERVICES

Community-led advocacy group Health Action Wānaka is calling on Minister for Health Dr Shane Reti to give the Southern health region access to faster and free radiology services.

The Minister [recently announced a \\$30 million funding boost](#) to give people free access to radiology services when referred directly by their general practitioner. The first areas to benefit from the funding are Wellington and the Hutt Valley and the Minister said these areas would be followed by other districts with poor access to radiology services.

Health Action Wānaka Chair Monique Mayze said the Upper Clutha area in particular had poor access to radiology services.

“We’ve heard stories of people who live in Wānaka travelling more than three hours for a ten-minute appointment with a specialist in Dunedin to get a referral for diagnostic imaging.

“Locals often have to take time off work and stay overnight in Dunedin or Invercargill simply to see a specialist for a referral.

“Allowing GPs to refer patients directly for a wider range of diagnostic imaging would reduce the need for people to travel.

“We all know that 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.”

In his recent announcement, Minister Reti said the funding boost would pay private providers to do scans, reducing the need for people living in rural areas to travel to a public hospital to access publicly funded radiology services.

Ms Mayze said the removal of co-payments would be welcomed by people living in the Upper Clutha who already pay more for radiology services due to Pacific Radiology’s dominance of the market.

“Our group did a price comparison of radiology services and discovered that people in Wānaka, Queenstown and Dunedin pay \$375 for a shoulder ultrasound in the private system while the same service costs \$310 when delivered by Beyond Radiology in Christchurch.

“People in our community face many barriers when it comes to healthcare. Having access to the government’s new funding for radiology services would go a long way to reducing the strain on our community.”

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.

Growth in the Central Otago district has been similarly rapid, up by 12.7% to 24,306, the fifth-highest in the country, and more than double the national average of 6.3%.

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.

For more information, please contact Health Action Wānaka Chair Monique Mayze on 027 956 5522 or email: info@healthactionwanaka.nz