

11 April 2012

Peseta Sam Lotu-Liga, MP
Chair
Select Committee Social Services
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Minister

Social Security (Youth Support and Work Focus) Amendment Bill

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) is New Zealand's largest medical organisation and has a pan professional membership. We have around 5,000 members who come from all disciplines within the medical profession and include specialists, general practitioners, doctors-in-training and medical students.

The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and promote:

- professional unity and values, and
- the health of all New Zealanders.

The key roles of the NZMA are to:

- provide advocacy on behalf of doctors and their patients
- provide support and services to members and their practices
- publish and maintain the Code of Ethics for the profession
- publish the New Zealand Medical Journal.

We are pleased to be able to provide our comments on the Social Security (Youth Support and Work Focus) Amendment Bill (the Social Security Bill).

The issue of youth and health equity¹ is important to the NZMA. In particular the youth of today are New Zealand's future parents, workers, citizens and leaders. As the New Zealand Institute noted in its 2011 discussion paper "More ladders, fewer snakes: Two proposals to reduce youth disadvantage"²

¹ The NZMA has prepared a position statement on health equity which can be found in the February edition of the New Zealand Medical Journal, NZMA Health Equity position statement, NZMJ 4 March 2011
<http://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal/124-1330/4569/content.pdf>

² R Bovan, C Harland and L Grace, July 2011

Improving outcomes for disadvantaged youth will provide three important benefits: lower harm and costs while the youth are young, establishing the youth on better trajectories for the remainder of their lives and a better start in life for their children.

While it is pleasing to see that the Government is taking a focus on youth at this time we are unsure whether the Government has achieved the appropriate balance between support for, and direction of, youth in order to achieve the gains desired.

Having said the above the NZMA turns to the draft provisions on the information sharing provisions of the bill which cause us some unease.

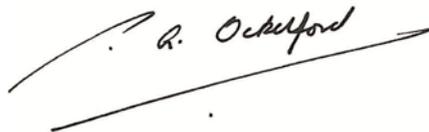
Firstly, we are concerned by the decision to place the provisions relating to (personal) information sharing in the Social Security Bill when it is more appropriate that they should be in the Privacy (Information Sharing) Amendment Bill (the Privacy Bill). The NZMA understands that the reason for this is that the Government wanted these provisions to take effect from 30 July and that the Privacy Bill would not have taken effect by then. However as the Privacy Bill will take effect only two weeks later the delay does not seem to be so significant as to warrant the information sharing provisions being set out in separate legislation, as this is likely to give rise to confusion. The NZMA appreciates that the Government will try to ensure consistency between the provisions in the Social Security Bill and the Privacy Bill however in our view the best way to do this is for all information privacy rules to be kept within the Privacy Act.

Secondly we are concerned that under the information sharing provisions of the Social Security Bill contractors will be able to access information about potential clients (i.e. before the client has consented to this). While we understand that this has been allowed so that contractors can go into schools and gain contact details of their potential clients it seems inappropriate to us to bypass the rules of the Privacy Act for this group of people and we believe that the rules set out in the Privacy Act should apply.

Finally, we are concerned about the lack of clarity around how these rules will work in practice and would like to see further guidelines developed.

We do not wish to appear before Select Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr Paul Ockelford", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Paul Ockelford
NZMA Chair