



TE ORANGA AOTEAROA

KOTAHITANGA
MANAAKITANGA
TAKAWAENGA

NZMSA

NEW ZEALAND
MEDICAL STUDENTS'
ASSOCIATION

22 June 2026

Statement on the Minister of Health's Changes to Leadership of the Medical Council of New Zealand

Te Oranga Aotearoa and the New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA) are deeply concerned by the Minister of Health's decision not to reappoint Medical Council Chair Dr Rachelle Love and Deputy Chair Simon Watt. We strongly reject recent comments from Hon Simeon Brown, describing cultural competence, cultural safety, and Hauora Māori as an "ideological agenda", and believe these remarks reflect and reinforce a wider pattern of decisions that undermine Māori health equity and exacerbate inequities for Māori and other marginalised communities.

We first want to acknowledge Dr Rachelle Love's leadership, mana, and service as the first wāhine Māori Chair of the Medical Council. Her contribution represents important leadership for the profession, for Māori health, and for future Māori doctors. We also acknowledge the doctors, health leaders, researchers, whānau, hapū, iwi, and communities whose expertise has shaped cultural safety and Hauora Māori guidance over many years.

To reiterate the statement from our tuakana, Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa: cultural competence, cultural safety, and Hauora Māori are not ideological distractions from patient care. They are integral to safe, ethical, effective, and equitable healthcare in Aotearoa.

As medical students and future doctors, cultural competence, cultural safety, and Hauora Māori are integral components of our education and are embedded throughout the curriculum. We are taught that clinical care requires more than technical and clinical knowledge. It requires communication, critical reflection, humility, and an understanding of the social, cultural, and systemic factors that shape patient and whānau experiences and health outcomes. The actions and comments of the Minister risk widening health inequities by attempting to reframe these evidence-based components of medical education and professional practice as "ideology". These skills are essential to improving health outcomes for Māori and prepare us to challenge the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and inequity in healthcare for present and future generations of Māori.

As national student associations, we represent the interests and wellbeing of medical students across the motu. We believe that framing cultural safety as an abstract ideology is a colonial imposition that undermines the wellbeing of the diverse students we represent and disregards generations of Māori health expertise. We are concerned this narrative risks weakening the medical standards that are critical to Māori health equity and safe care for our patients and whānau.

We are also concerned by the implications of political interference in an independent health professional regulator. The Medical Council's role is to set standards for competent and ethical medical practice to serve the people of Aotearoa. Undermining that independence risks weakening public trust, professional accountability, and the consistency of standards that keep patients and whānau safe.

Te Oranga and NZMSA strongly reject these comments, and will continue to advocate for communities made vulnerable by inequitable health systems that are likely to experience the negative impacts and health outcomes arising from these actions. We call on the Minister to recognise that cultural safety is an essential component of medical professionalism, grounded in evidence that clinical outcomes are improved when clinicians respond to cultural, historical, and systemic factors that shape patient experiences and outcomes.



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