

Public Issues Report to the NZAP Council, June 2022

There are two aspects of public issues in NZAP that are worth highlighting. The first is the sheer diversity of areas which it has come to cover. The second is what it highlights about NZAP's specific place within the larger mental health field within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Where diversity is concerned, our small but active team embraces a very wide range of engagement. It stretches across a broad spectrum from regular contact with Ministry of Health executives, culminating most recently in the former Deputy DG's appearance at our April conference to persistent Allied Health and ACC interaction. This has been tirelessly prosecuted by Victoria Smith, particularly with the extra demands around vaccination requirements. We have met with bodies such as the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (Andrew Jones), with the Mental Health Foundation (Veronica Watt and myself) and the planned Wellington Depression Recovery Centre (Roy Bowden and myself). Elsewhere, we have discussed developing a national Psychotherapy Day, engaged in long dialogue around the Conversion Therapy Bill and, recently, with Claire Miranda, encompassed mental health and climate change in association with Ora Taiao. We have trialled Twitter, Signal as a messaging app, and a podcast. Some of our team are involved in the development of the proposed Academy training model for NZAP which will very much have a public face.

If I emphasise that all this work is voluntary, it is to point to how hard our Mental Health and Addictions Team works within this area, and how grateful I am for their commitment and integrity. It is also to highlight the overwhelming demands on a voluntary team of trying to create a visible face for NZAP across such a wide spectrum. We are currently, for example, discussing how we think long-term about NZAP's influence: this is particularly with the arrival of Health New Zealand and the Maori Health Authority. Although we are a tiny voice in this intensive, politicised environment, we bring a unique skillset, experience and determination. So, our discussion is how we best utilize these qualities through the coming transitions.

Our earlier strategies, from the 2018 He Ara Oranga Enquiry, are now less relevant. Instead, we are discussing how we may comment and engage publicly from our unique perspective on psychodynamics, systems and sociocultural expertise, whether this is around climate change issues, social media or continuing failures in mental health delivery. Simultaneously, we are continuing with the more immediate practicalities of AHA NZ, ACC, new mental health developments and other concerns.

I want to emphasise how lucky NZAP is to have such a cohesive, committed, thoughtful and expert team in this area. Its membership has changed over time, but it is now larger than at any other point.

My very real gratitude to our team: Veronica Watt, Victoria Smith, Roy Bowden, Andrew Jones, Lynne Holdem and, most recently, Claire Miranda, for their enthusiasm and energy. It is a rare thing to write, but I usually leave our monthly Zoom calls more refreshed than when I join them.

John Farnsworth
Chair of Public Issues