



Te Aho o Te Kahu, Cancer Control Agency Press Release
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COVID cancer 'catch up' in full swing

A report released today by Te Aho o Te Kahu, the independent Cancer Control Agency, shows a 'catch up' in cancer diagnoses is underway.

Professor Diana Sarfati, CE of Te Aho o Te Kahu says, "During the COVID-19 lockdown the majority of cancer treatments in New Zealand continued, but we did see a reduction in the number of people diagnosed with cancer. This was because screening programmes were paused, and diagnostic tests and outpatient clinics were scaled back as we braced for the unknown impact of the epidemic."

"Since lockdown lifted we have seen a major ramping up of cancer services, with many in the sector doing weekend and evening work, as well as outsourcing, to catch up on the COVID created backlog. The dedication and innovation of all those involved in cancer care has been outstanding."

The report shows there was a substantial increase in new cancer registrations and diagnostic procedures in June 2020 compared to May 2020.

"While a cancer diagnosis is never good news, this increase in diagnoses does mean we are catching up on the delayed diagnoses of lockdown and 225 people can now begin treatment."

Sarfati warned, though, that challenges remain, "With these new diagnoses there is extra pressure on chemotherapy and radiation services, which are already stretched in some parts of the country. The Agency will be working with the Ministry of Health and DHBs to ensure people can get the treatment they need, when they need it."

Cancer services are now fully operational so people concerned they may have cancer should see their doctor immediately with the expectation that testing will be carried out in the usual way.

Te Aho o Te Kahu is working towards a goal of fewer cancers, better survival and equity for all. The Agency acknowledges there was much work to be done to improve cancer service capacity nationally, even before the COVID pandemic.

"With COVID currently contained at our borders, we will continue to develop our work programme in consultation with the cancer sector to deliver much needed improvements in cancer care," says Sarfati.

ENDS

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