



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

New Zealand

New Zealand – NZL38874 – Public Health System – Health Support for Low Income Earners – Withholding of Medical Treatment – Comparison with Australian Medical Treatment – Comparison to Medical Treatment in other Developed Countries

10 June 2011

1. Please provide some background information on the New Zealand public health system.

New Zealand's health care system shares similarities with its counterpart in Australia. In brief, citizens receive many health services free of charge;¹ however, co-payment fees are common¹ and there has been significant growth in the private health insurance industry. This growth is due in part to the length of hospital waiting lists,² and to the fact both public and private systems draw from the same limited workforce of medical professionals.³

In terms of governance arrangements below Ministerial level, day-to-day operations and approximately three quarters of New Zealand's health funding are administered by 20 District Health Boards. These boards "manage, provide and purchase health services" for their constituencies.⁴ The diagram below depicts governance arrangements across New Zealand's health system in detail:

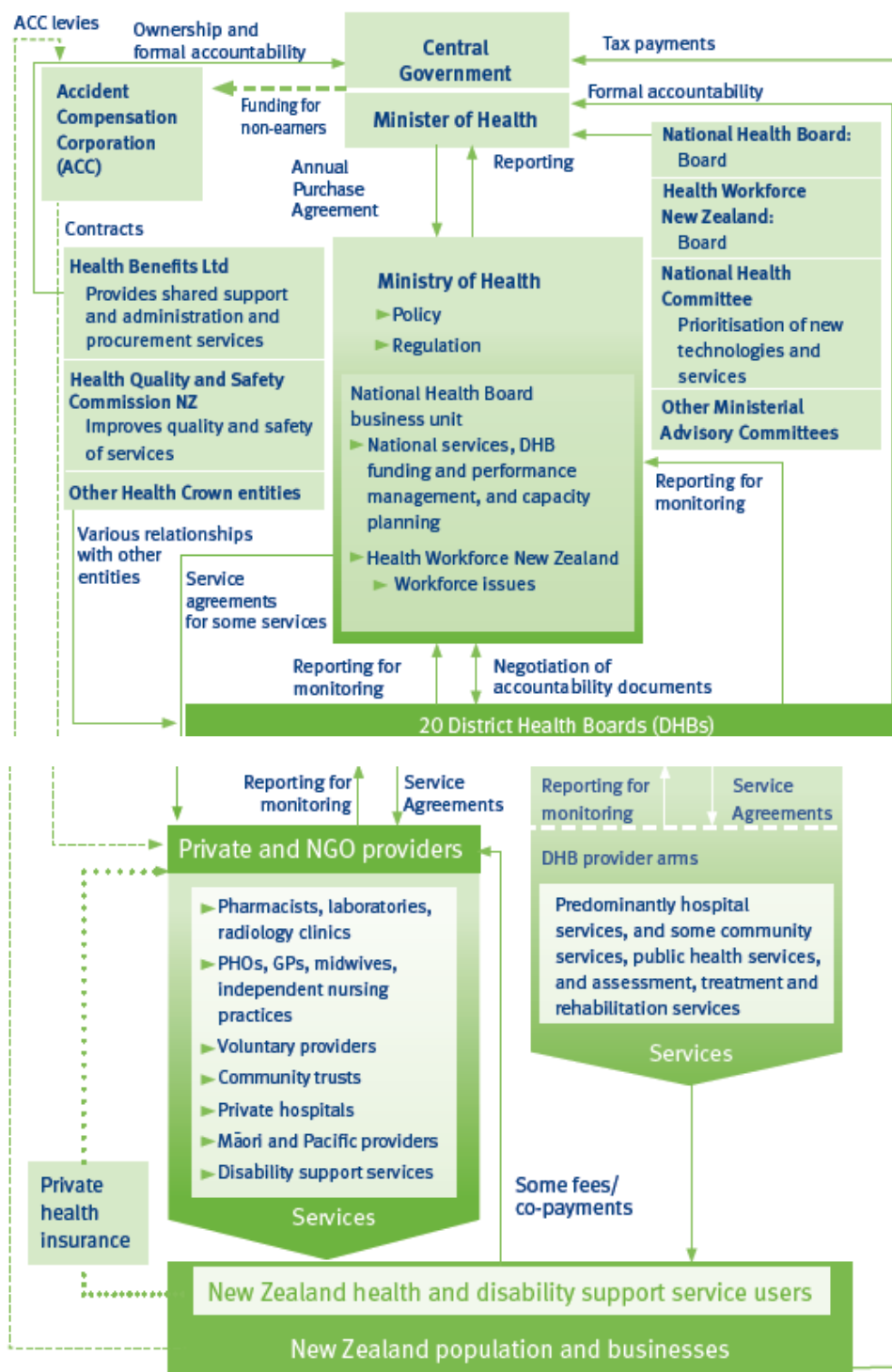
¹ 'New Zealand Health System' 2011, webhealth.co.nz website, 4 May
<http://www.webhealth.co.nz/articles/view/article/668/new-zealand-health-system/> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 1

² 'Expat guide to New Zealand: health care' 2011, *The Telegraph*, 10 February
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/expathealth/8308330/Expat-guide-to-New-Zealand-health-care.html> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 2

³ Wagstaff, R. 2010, 'Private health sector thrives as public hospitals struggle' Stuff.co.nz website, source: *The Dominion Post*, 23 November <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/4374723/Private-health-sector-thrives-as-public-hospitals-struggle> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 3

⁴ 'Overview of the Health System' (undated), Ministry of Health website <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 4

The structure of the New Zealand health and disability sector



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⁵ 'The Structure of the New Zealand Health and Disability Sector' (undated), New Zealand Ministry of Health website http://www.health.govt.nz/webfm_send/28 – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 5

Free public health services are provided to: citizens; those with residency status or a work permit valid for at least two years; those with proof of refugee status; and residents of Australia and the United Kingdom who require “immediate necessary treatment”. Free treatment is only provided to other individuals as the result of an accident where acute emergency care is required; or if compulsory treatment is required under relevant tuberculosis, mental health or alcohol and drug addiction legislation.⁶

All of New Zealand’s major towns are equipped with hospitals. However, not all services are provided by these hospitals and patients may be required to seek private services.⁷ New Zealand’s Ministry of Health reports that in 2009, there were 823,190 hospital discharges for public “medical and surgical services”.⁸ However, specifically what sorts of services were performed is unclear, and no sources were located containing an exhaustive list of specifically what surgeries and treatments are available in which public hospitals. A 2010 article in the *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association* reports that commercialisation of the health sector, beginning in the 1990s, effectively made treatment inaccessible for some patients who were on long waiting lists:

Four years into the health reforms, “hospital waiting lists for many procedures had become longer, by as much as 50%”. Thereafter, patients with non-urgent conditions for whom treatment could not now be provided in the public hospital system within an arbitrary timeframe, were either refused outpatient assessment or dropped from elective waiting lists. The unmet need also became unseen.⁹

The webhealth.co.nz website advises readers to talk to their General Practitioner (GP) about the demarcation between public and private services, in relation to their particular health needs.¹⁰

New Zealand’s Ministry of Health reports that the following public services were provided to eligible patients in 2009:

- 11.8 million GP consultations
- 1.74 million nurse consultations
- 59.1 million prescription items dispensed
- 24.3 million laboratory tests
- 823,190 hospital discharges for medical and surgical services
- 114,156 people accessed mental health services
- 638 outbreaks of communicable diseases investigated
- 30,524 ‘green’ prescriptions (advice on exercise or nutrition) dispensed
- 441,180 cervical smears
- 569,646 free influenza vaccinations
- 81,028 free annual checks for people with diabetes.¹¹

⁶ ‘Eligibility’ (undated), Capital and Coast District Health Board website <http://www.ccdhb.org.nz/patient/Eligibility.htm> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 6

⁷ ‘New Zealand Health System’ 2011, webhealth.co.nz website, 4 May <http://www.webhealth.co.nz/articles/view/article/668/new-zealand-health-system/> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 1

⁸ ‘Overview of the Health System’ (undated), Ministry of Health website <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 4

⁹ Bagshaw, P. F., Allardyce, R. A., Bagshaw, S. N, et al. 2010, ‘Patients “falling through the cracks”. The Canterbury Charity Hospital: initial progress report’, *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association*, Vol. 123, No. 1320, 13 August <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/123-1320/4262/> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 7

¹⁰ ‘Overview of the Health System’ (undated), Ministry of Health website <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 4

¹¹ ‘Overview of the Health System’ (undated), Ministry of Health website <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 4

Although visits to GPs are provided for in the public health system,¹² co-payments are usually required from patients.¹³ A blog source indicates that these payments are generally for an amount between NZD30-60 per consultation.¹⁴ Medicines are subsidised by a government organisation called Pharmac. New Zealanders pay between NZD3-15 per item for subsidised medicines.¹⁵ Commonly used services not covered or with only limited cover under the public health system include dental care, physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic services and ambulance services. Residential aged care is means tested.¹⁶

2. Please provide advice on whether the public health system in New Zealand provides free medical and hospital treatment to unemployed citizens of New Zealand; or support for low income or unemployed persons requiring specialist surgery and hospital treatment.

As discussed in the response to Question 1, those services which are provided through the public health system are free for all citizens and those with residency status in New Zealand, regardless of income. However, co-payments for services, including for visits to GPs, are common. Some measures are in place to assist low income earners with the cost of health care.

The Community Services Card is available for adult citizens and legal residents who earn a “low to middle income” or who receive a main source of income support, including unemployment benefits and sickness benefits. Eligibility for the card is means tested against the size of the family applying. A single person living alone may be eligible for the Community Services Card if their annual income before tax is NZD25,933 or less. Benefits for cardholders include:

- A reduction in the cost of prescriptions for some cardholders;
- Increased options to visit different GPs, and for after hours doctor’s visits;
- Home assistance;
- Travel and accommodation when referred to a public hospital outside of the cardholder’s area of residence;
- Emergency dental care for some cardholders; and
- Free glasses for children under 16.¹⁷

Citizens who do not pass the means test for a Community Services Card may qualify for a High Use Health Card. This card is issued to individuals who visit the doctor 12 times or more within a 12 month period. The High Use Health Card provides for the same benefits as the Community Services card, but is an individual, rather than a family card.¹⁸ Families who pay for 20

¹² ‘Overview of the Health System’ (undated), Ministry of Health website <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 4

¹³ ‘New Zealand Health System’ 2011, webhealth.co.nz website, 4 May <http://www.webhealth.co.nz/articles/view/article/668/new-zealand-health-system/> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 1

¹⁴ ‘Access to healthcare in New Zealand’ 2011, Avalon Blog website, 16 February <http://www.avalonguide.com/anab/2011/02/access-to-healthcare-in-new-zealand/> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 8

¹⁵ Further information about subsidised medicines can be found at – www.pharmac.govt.nz.

¹⁶ ‘New Zealand Health System – what you might pay for healthcare’ 2007, everybody.co.nz website <http://www.everybody.co.nz/page-0a4164ca-3942-4d25-a6af-fa77aac8de68.aspx> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 9

¹⁷ ‘Community Services Card – Helping you with the costs of health care’ Work and Income website, p. 2 <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/community-services-card.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 10

¹⁸ ‘Community Services Card – Helping you with the costs of health care’ Work and Income website, p. 11 <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/community-services-card.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 10

subsidised prescriptions from 1 February in any given year may be eligible for a Pharmaceutical Subsidy Card.¹⁹ A government website containing information about concession cards also states that low to middle income earners may be able to access “some other types of help” but does not provide details aside from suggesting that people with disabilities may be eligible for home support services.²⁰

Canterbury Charity Hospital provides free specialist medical services, including day surgery, for people in the Canterbury District Health Board region who cannot access care through the public system. The *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association* reported in 2010 that of the last 300 patients seen at Canterbury, at least 41 per cent were unemployed.²¹

No further information was located in relation to the provision of any targeted support for unemployed or low income individuals who require particular specialist services.

3. Please provide information on whether there is any discriminatory withholding of medical or hospital treatment from any individuals or groups of New Zealand citizens.

Reports were located in relation to three cases where by virtue of sharing specific characteristics, certain groups experience particular difficulties in accessing public health services.

Firstly, *The Dominion Post* reports that patients diagnosed with a range of 14 cancers, including melanoma and cervical cancer relapses, are no longer eligible for oncologist services in the Central North Island. These services were previously publicly available, and remain publicly available in other areas of New Zealand. The MidCentral District Health Board states that a shortage of oncologists is the reason behind its directive to stop providing oncology services to patients with the list of 14 conditions.²²

Secondly, medical treatment required as the result of an accident is paid for through New Zealand’s Accident Compensation Commission (ACC).²³ The *New Zealand Herald* reports that “ACC legislation specifically withholds cover for injuries that are “wholly or substantially” – usually taken to mean “largely” – caused by ageing.” Several news reports contain references to accident victims, particularly those with shoulder injuries, being deemed ineligible for compensation if their condition is deemed to be the result of wear and tear and ageing rather than the result of the accident. The same article further reports that ACC commitments to reduce the number of people receiving compensation has reduced the number of accident victims able to access timely elective surgery for their injuries. However, it is important to note that although

¹⁹ ‘New Zealand Health System – what you might pay for healthcare’ 2007, everybody.co.nz website <http://www.everybody.co.nz/page-0a4164ca-3942-4d25-a6af-fa77aac8de68.aspx> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 9

²⁰ ‘Community Services Card – Helping you with the costs of health care’, Work and Income website, p. 11 <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/community-services-card.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 10

²¹ Bagshaw, P. F., Allardyce, R. A., Bagshaw, S. N., Stokes, B. W., Shaw, C. S., Proffit, L. J., Nicholls, M. G., Begg, E. J. & Frampton, C. M. 2010, ‘Patients “falling through the cracks”. The Canterbury Charity Hospital: initial progress report’, *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association*, vol. 123, no. 1320, 13 August <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/123-1320/4262/> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 7

²² Joyce, D. 2011, ‘Treatment cut for cancer patients’ Stuff.co.nz website, source: *The Dominion Post*, 4 January <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/4510152/Treatment-cut-for-cancer-patients> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 11

²³ ‘Overview of the Health System’ (undated), Ministry of Health website <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 4

compensation may be denied on the basis of age, medical services are not entirely withheld as patients in these circumstances requiring surgery would enter public hospital waiting lists.²⁴

Finally and more generally, as alluded to in the response to Question 1, individuals who do not have proof of citizenship, residency or refugee status are not generally eligible for public health services. Ineligible patients seeking general specialist services in public hospitals will be prioritised alongside eligible patients for treatment. However, this will only happen if there is spare capacity to perform necessary treatment, and the patient may be charged the estimated cost for the treatment in advance.²⁵ The District Health Board administering hospitals in the Central North Island explicitly states that ineligible patients are charged for services in advance.²⁶ Patients who are too unwell to make a decision regarding treatment deemed necessary to prevent “loss of life or significant disability” will not be denied medical services; ineligible patients treated under these circumstances will be charged afterwards.²⁷

4. Is there any information in relation to whether the New Zealand health system is able to provide the same level of specialist medical treatment as is available in Australia, especially in relation to ulcerative colitis? If so please provide details on this.

Without a detailed knowledge of which surgical and ongoing treatment services are required, and the exact extent to which any or all such services would be covered or partially-covered under New Zealand’s public health system, it is difficult to provide a direct comparison between Australian and New Zealand systems with respect to an individual’s specific circumstances.

As illustrated in the response to Question 1, there are similarities between the public health systems in Australia and New Zealand. An October 2010 article in *Anaesthesia* describes a study on mortality and complications in older surgery patients. The study, conducted across 23 hospitals from every Australian state and from New Zealand, found that “among older patients in Australia and New Zealand, one in five had at least one complication and one in twenty died after surgery, with almost 1 in 10 admitted to critical care services”.²⁸ No stark difference in results from participating New Zealand hospitals and their Australian counterparts is reported in the article. The article states that New Zealand specialists “often undertake advanced training in either the UK or North America. As in the UK, specialty medical colleges in Australia and New Zealand (covering both countries) oversee training in anaesthesia, surgery, intensive care and internal medicine.”²⁹

²⁴ Johnston, M. and Collins, S. 2010, ‘Clients feel pain of ACC cuts’, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 November http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10685673 – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 12

²⁵ ‘Eligibility for Publicly Funded Health and Disability Services – Questions and Answers for Service Users’ 2011, New Zealand Ministry of Health website, 23 May <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/eligibility-faq-serviceusers#acute> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 13

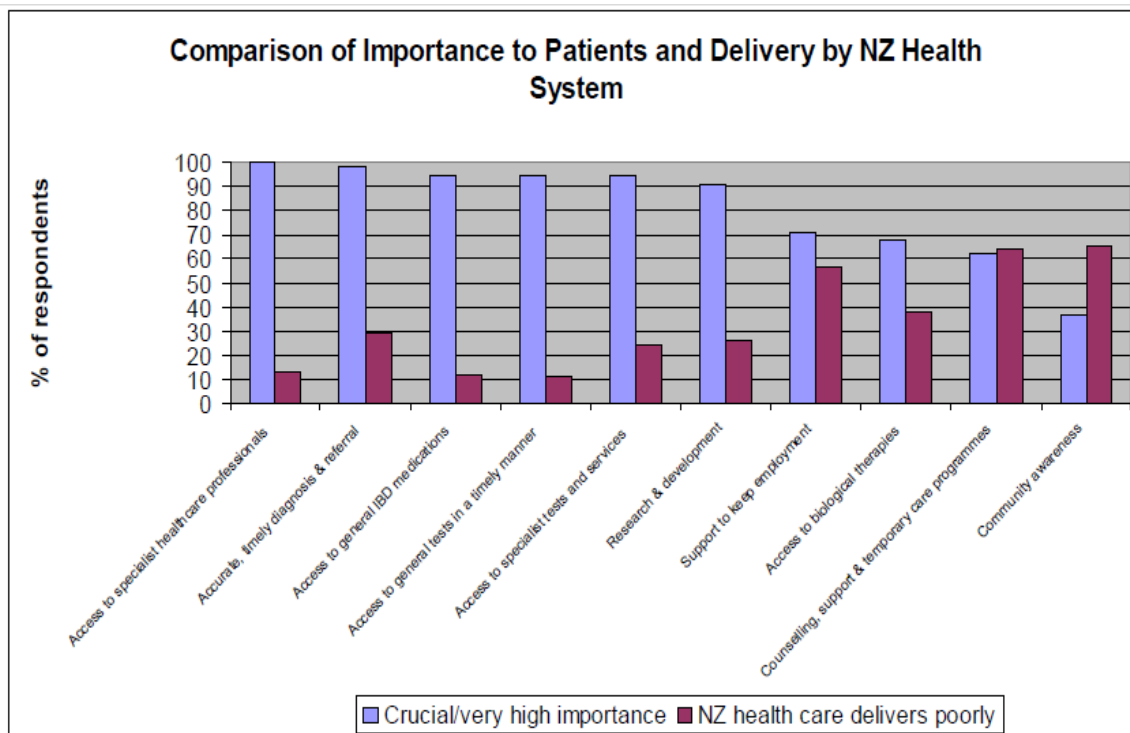
²⁶ ‘Eligibility’ (undated), Capital and Coast District Health Board website <http://www.ccdhb.org.nz/patient/Eligibility.htm> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 6

²⁷ ‘Eligibility for Publicly Funded Health and Disability Services – Questions and Answers for Service Users’ 2011, New Zealand Ministry of Health website, 23 May <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/eligibility-faq-serviceusers#acute> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 13

²⁸ Story, D. A., Leslie, K., Myles, P. S., Fink, M., et al. 2010, ‘Complications and mortality in older surgical patients in Australia and New Zealand (the REASON study): a multicentre, prospective, observational study’ *Anaesthesia*, Vol. 65, p. 1022-1030, October, p. 1027 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2044.2010.06478.x/pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 14

²⁹ Story, D. A., Leslie, K., Myles, P. S., Fink, M., et al. 2010, ‘Complications and mortality in older surgical patients in Australia and New Zealand (the REASON study): a multicentre, prospective, observational study’ *Anaesthesia*, Vol. 65, p. 1022-1030, October, p. 1023 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2044.2010.06478.x/pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 14

Ulcerative colitis is a form of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), which often results in the removal of the colon. The Chrons and Colitis New Zealand website contains information on ulcerative colitis, including symptoms, treatment and support groups.^{30 31} A Dunedin support group newsletter reports that in a national survey of 178 people with IBD, just over 10 per cent of respondents thought that the New Zealand health system delivered poorly in providing access to health care professionals. Thirty per cent of respondents thought that the system performed poorly in providing for timely diagnosis and referral. These results are depicted in the graph below:³²



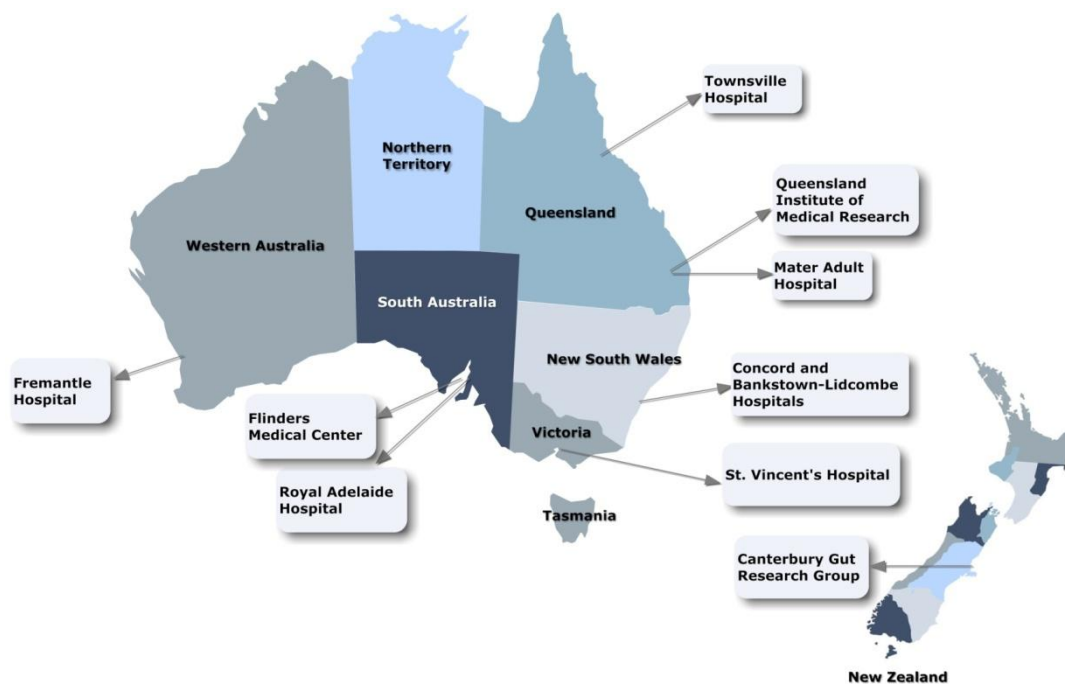
In terms of medical research, the Australia and New Zealand Inflammatory Bowel Disease Consortium (ANZIBDC) was established in 2008. Each centre in the consortium contributes data and biological samples to collaborative projects. The consortium has piloted a health record and clinical research software platform designed for the management of IBD patients, and, according to its website, will soon commence the first Chron’s disease inception cohort study outside of Europe and the United States. ANZIBDC currently comprises nine Gastroenterology centres, as shown below:³³

³⁰ ‘Ulcerative colitis’ (undated), Chron’s and Colitis New Zealand website http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz/about_crohns_and_colitis/ulcerative_colitis – Accessed 8 June 2011 – Attachment 15

³¹ ‘Support groups’ (undated), Chron’s and Colitis New Zealand website http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz/support_groups – Accessed 8 June 2011 – Attachment 16

³² ‘Newsletter September 2010’ 2010, Chron’s Colitis New Zealand, Support Group, Dunedin, September http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/17663/Newsletter_Sept_2010.pdf – Accessed 7 June 2011– Attachment 17

³³ ‘Australia and New Zealand Inflammatory Bowel Disease Consortium (ANZIBDC)’ (undated), Brisbane IBD Research Group website <http://www.ibd.qimr.edu.au/anzibdc.html> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 18



5. Please provide information on how New Zealand medical and health treatment ranks in comparison to other OECD or advanced countries.

In 2010, *The Telegraph* reported that New Zealand’s health system performs comparatively efficiently. The article reported that New Zealand spends less on health care than several other developed countries, but had a higher life expectancy than the United Kingdom.³⁴ A 2010 *Reuters* article similarly states that of seven developed countries,³⁵ New Zealand spends the least on health care, at USD2,454 per person.³⁶

New Zealand sits within the World Health Organisation (WHO) Western Pacific Region. The region includes a mix of developing and developed economies.³⁷ According to the WHO, New Zealand performs above both regional and global averages in relation to life expectancy; adult, child and maternal mortality rates; and prevalence of HIV and tuberculosis.³⁸

Data from the World Health Organisation indicate that while Australia spends more on health care and has a higher rate of physicians on a per capita basis both Australia and New Zealand

³⁴ Expat guide to New Zealand: health care’ 2011, *The Telegraph*, 10 February <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/expathealth/8308330/Expat-guide-to-New-Zealand-health-care.html> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 2

³⁵ The countries are the United States, Canada, The United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Germany, Australia and New Zealand.

³⁶ Fox, M. 2010, ‘U.S. scores dead last again in healthcare study’ *Reuters*, 23 June <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/06/23/us-usa-healthcare-last-idUSTRE65M0SU20100623> – Accessed 8 June 2011 – Attachment 19

³⁷ World Health Organization (undated), ‘Countries and areas’ World Health Organization Western Pacific Region website <http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/list.htm> – Accessed 9 June 2011 – Attachment 20

³⁸ World Health Organisation 2011, ‘New Zealand – Health Profile’, World Health Organisation website, 4 April <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/nzl.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 21

rank well compared with other countries in the WHO Western Pacific region in terms of health expenditure and workforce.^{39 40}

Australia appears to have both a strong medical research sector and the inclination to share its research findings. The Ranking Web of World Hospitals website compares hospitals worldwide, ranking them on electronic publications and dissemination in terms of research. Australia, ranked 16 worldwide with nine hospitals in the top 500 by the website's criteria, outranks New Zealand at number 34 worldwide with two hospitals in the top 500.⁴¹

6. Deleted.

Attachments

1. 'New Zealand Health System' 2011, webhealth.co.nz website, 4 May
<http://www.webhealth.co.nz/articles/view/article/668/new-zealand-health-system/> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
2. 'Expatriate guide to New Zealand: health care' 2011, *The Telegraph*, 10 February
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/expathealth/8308330/Expatriate-guide-to-New-Zealand-health-care.html> – Accessed 7 June 2011
3. Wagstaff, R. 2010, 'Private health sector thrives as public hospitals struggle' Stuff.co.nz website, source: *The Dominion Post*, 23 November <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/4374723/Private-health-sector-thrives-as-public-hospitals-struggle> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
4. 'Overview of the Health System' (undated), Ministry of Health website
<http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/overview-health-system> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
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³⁹ World Health Organisation 2011, 'New Zealand – Health Profile', World Health Organisation website, 4 April
<http://www.who.int/gho/countries/nzl.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011. – Attachment 21

⁴⁰ World Health Organisation 2011, 'Australia – Health Profile', World Health Organisation website, 4 April
<http://www.who.int/gho/countries/aus.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 22

⁴¹ Cybermetrics Lab CSIC 2011, 'Distribution by Country', Ranking Web of World Hospitals website, January
http://hospitals.webometrics.info/Distribution_by_Country.asp – Accessed 7 June 2011 – Attachment 23

9. 'New Zealand Health System – what you might pay for healthcare' 2007, everybody.co.nz website <http://www.everybody.co.nz/page-0a4164ca-3942-4d25-a6af-fa77aac8de68.aspx> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
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14. Story, D. A., Leslie, K., Myles, P. S., et al. 2010, 'Complications and mortality in older surgical patients in Australia and New Zealand (the REASON study): a multicentre, prospective, observational study' *Anaesthesia*, Vol. 65, p. 1022-1030, October, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2044.2010.06478.x/pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
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16. 'Support groups' (undated), Chron's and Colitis New Zealand website http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz/support_groups - Accessed 8 June 2011.
17. 'Newsletter September 2010' 2010, Chron's Colitis New Zealand, Support Group, Dunedin, September http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/17663/Newsletter_Sept_2010.pdf – Accessed 7 June 2011.
18. 'Australia and New Zealand Inflammatory Bowel Disease Consortium (ANZIBDC)' (undated), Brisbane IBD Research Group website <http://www.ibd.qimr.edu.au/anzibdc.html> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
19. Fox, M. 2010, 'U.S. scores dead last again in healthcare study' *Reuters*, 23 June <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/06/23/us-usa-healthcare-last-idUSTRE65M0SU20100623> – Accessed 8 June 2011.
20. World Health Organization (undated), 'Countries and areas' World Health Organization Western Pacific Region website <http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/list.htm> – Accessed 9 June 2011.
21. World Health Organisation 2011, 'New Zealand – Health Profile', World Health Organisation website, 4 April <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/nzl.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011.

22. World Health Organisation 2011, 'Australia – Health Profile', World Health Organisation website, 4 April <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/aus.pdf> – Accessed 7 June 2011.
23. Cybermetrics Lab CSIC 2011, 'Distribution by Country', Ranking Web of World Hospitals website, January http://hospitals.webometrics.info/Distribution_by_Country.asp – Accessed 7 June 2011.
24. Deleted.
25. Deleted.
26. Deleted.