

16 September 2021

Inquiry Director  
New Zealand Productivity Commission

Submitted online

## **Immigration Settings Inquiry – Issues Paper**

Dear Colleague,

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to provide feedback on the above consultation. The NZMA is New Zealand’s largest medical organisation, with about 5,000 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. Our submission has been informed by feedback from our Board, Advisory Councils and members.

We welcome this inquiry and the Productivity Commission’s issues paper on Immigration, Productivity and Wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> We note that the terms of reference for the inquiry are broad, with the Government tasking the Commission to undertake an inquiry into New Zealand’s “working-age” immigration system and make recommendations on changes that would best promote “long-term economic growth and the wellbeing of New Zealanders.” We note that the inquiry will not cover decisions taken by the Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand that there will be further opportunity to provide feedback on a report expected later in the year which will contain the Commission’s draft findings and recommendations. At this stage, the focus of our feedback is limited to drawing the Commission’s attention to how immigration settings impact on the medical and wider health workforce.

Immigration plays an important role in sustaining New Zealand’s medical and wider health workforce, with 43% of doctors in New Zealand being International Medical Graduates (IMGs).<sup>2</sup> This proportion is the second highest among OECD countries. Dependency on IMGs is much greater in the provinces than in the larger urban centres. International medical migration trends

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Productivity Commission. Immigration, productivity and wellbeing: Issues paper. June 2021. Available from [www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/immigration-settings](http://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/immigration-settings)

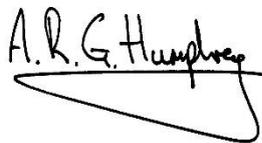
<sup>2</sup> Medical Council of New Zealand. The New Zealand Medical Workforce in 2019. Available from <https://www.mcnz.org.nz/assets/Publications/Workforce-Survey/6be731ea72/Workforce-Survey-Report-2019.pdf>

are complex, influenced by a range of factors including growing health needs, retention rates, economic and financial policies, domestic training policies, and opportunities for family members, all of which are fluid. The literature points to a range of push and pull factors that influence doctors' decisions to migrate.<sup>3</sup> Most IMGs do not stay in New Zealand for long periods, with just over 60% leaving in the first two years after they register. New Zealand's high dependency on IMGs makes us especially vulnerable to increased global competition for IMGs.<sup>4</sup>

We ask the Commission to specifically consider the impacts of immigration settings on the recruitment and retention of IMGs and other healthcare workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role the health system plays in protecting the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders, with doctors and other healthcare workers on the frontlines of the response to the pandemic. Yet even before the pandemic, there were critical shortages in the workforce across the health sector. Though outside the scope of the current consultation, we are very concerned at the effects of the Government's suspension, at the start of the pandemic, in processing expressions of interest (EOI) in skilled migrant residence visas. We note that the numbers of doctors who have submitted an EOI for skilled migrant residence has tripled to 675 since May and nurses have more than doubled to 2,231.<sup>5</sup> The uncertainty regarding timeframes and pathways to converting temporary skilled migrant residence visas to residency and difficulties in bringing family here are driving many doctors and other healthcare workers to leave New Zealand and deterring others from choosing New Zealand in the first instance.<sup>6</sup>

We hope our feedback is helpful and would welcome the opportunity to contribute further as this inquiry progresses.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. R. G. Humphrey". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long, horizontal stroke.

Dr Alistair Humphrey  
NZMA Chair

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<sup>3</sup> Gauld R, Horsburgh S. What motivates doctors to leave the UK NHS for a "life in the sun" in New Zealand; and, once there, why don't they stay? Hum Resour Health. 2015 Sep 8;13:75. Available from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26350706/>

<sup>4</sup> ASMS. International medical migration: How can New Zealand compete as specialist shortages intensify? Research Brief 2017. Available from [https://www.asms.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/IMG-Research-Brief\\_167359.5.pdf](https://www.asms.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/IMG-Research-Brief_167359.5.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21053461-skilled-migrant-residence-numbers-ia?responsive=1&title=1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/450641/almost-3000-doctors-and-nurses-waiting-to-apply-for-skilled-migrant-residence>