

## **Cancer treatment continued during August's COVID restrictions, while diagnosis dipped**

While cancer treatment continued largely uninterrupted through August's COVID-19 nationwide lockdown there was a decline in cancer diagnoses, according to a report released by Te Aho o Te Kahu, the Cancer Control Agency.

"The cancer sector has been working hard across the current restrictions to ensure essential cancer care continues. Their dedication and determination are captured in this data."

Overall, any disruption to services in August 2021 appears less for Māori than non-Māori. This aligns with findings from the 2020 reporting which found the COVID-19 response did not appear to have increased inequities in the cancer system.

There were 193 fewer people diagnosed with cancer in the month of August 2021 compared to August 2018/19 (an 9% decrease).

"We know hospitals temporarily changed the way they deliver services when COVID-19 re-emerged in the community," Professor Diana Sarfati says.

"This meant some diagnostic procedures were delayed or postponed, which is reflected in the data."

The decrease in new cancer registrations in August 2021 was most notable for prostate, colorectal and skin cancers.

Last year Te Aho o Te Kahu monitoring reports showed initially there was a large disruption to diagnostic services, contributing to a significant reduction in new cancer diagnoses in April 2020 compared to April 2019.

The number of cancers diagnosed increased over the following months and by the end of September 2020 were in line with the previous year.

"We expect any dip in diagnosis will be caught up, as was the case last year," Professor Sarfati says.

"It is vital anyone who is experiencing concerning symptoms talk to their doctor."

Anyone living with cancer should seek out COVID-19 vaccine immediately, if they have not already.

"Any cancer patient or whānau member who has not received a COVID-19 vaccination should get one as soon as possible," Professor Sarfati says.

"The vaccine is safe for cancer patients and is an important part of staying healthy for people with cancer. If you have not yet been vaccinated, please book online or call your doctor to arrange an appointment."

Te Aho o Te Kahu will continue to monitor the impact on diagnosis and treatment. The next report will focus on data from September and will be released next month.