

Te Aho o Te Kahu releases latest COVID-19 monitoring report

There was some disruption to cancer diagnosis and surgery during the peak of winter illness and COVID-19 cases earlier this year, according to the latest monitoring report by Te Aho o Te Kahu, the Cancer Control Agency.

The report analyses data from July, August, and September and shows the cancer system continued to operate under increased pressure, with some services affected.

“We can see downturns in delivery of some services - such as first appointments for cancer specialists – particularly in July,” acting chief executive for Te Aho o Te Kahu Nicola Hill said.

“These downturns are likely the result of the second Omicron wave and the added impact of other winter illnesses, such as influenza.”

Despite the initial impact, in September specialist appointments for haematology, radiation oncology and medical oncology all increased to pre-pandemic levels.

The report also showed cancer registrations until August 2022 increased 8% overall compared with the average of 2018/19 (pre-COVID-19).

For 2022 to date there were 3% fewer cancer surgeries performed compared to the average of 2018/19, due to lower volumes of colorectal cancer and breast cancer surgeries.

For Māori, there has been a 5% increase in combined cancer surgeries for the year to date relative to 2018/19.

The proportion of Māori lung cancer surgery was down by 16% for the year to date relative to 2018/19 (15 fewer surgeries). However, this proportion has improved compared to the 25% seen in the previous report using data up to June 2022.

“I know it has been a very unsettling time for those living with cancer and their whānau. The cancer workforce has been working incredibly hard to ensure all people receive the care they need,” Hill said.

“The fact this reporting shows many comparable results to the pre-pandemic period demonstrates that cancer workforce is working diligently to ensure the continuation of cancer care in Aotearoa.

“I want to thank them for their dedication and determination.”

Te Aho o Te Kahu is currently working on the Cancer Services Planning programme to help strengthen the cancer system going forward.

This includes addressing longstanding workforce issues within the cancer workforce. This is being completed alongside Te Whatu Ora and Te Aka Whai Ora.

“We are acutely aware the cancer workforce faces significant challenges, and we are working with our partners to ensure these issues can be remedied.

“We owe our cancer workforce a debt of gratitude for their incredible hard work during the pandemic to ensure people are well looked after.”

Te Aho o Te Kahu will continue to monitor the cancer system, with the next monitoring report expected in the first quarter of next year.

For more information please contact: 021 198 2196