

Health System Indicators

Questions and answers

December 2021

What is the Health System Indicators framework?

The Ministry of Health and the Health Quality & Safety Commission (the Commission) worked together to develop the Health System Indicators framework, which will improve how we measure and report on how the health and disability system is performing for New Zealanders.

The new framework replaces the previous health targets by recognising that local problems require local solutions. Its emphasis is on continuous improvements at a local level, to lift overall health system performance.

This means the actions developed to improve performance on each of the indicators will vary across the country to reflect the unique challenges and needs of each community.

The new framework builds on the System Level Measures programme that was co-designed with the health and disability sector.

The new framework sets out 12 high-level, national indicators that correspond with the Government's priorities. Ten of these indicators have been reported since August 2021 and a further two indicators are in development over 2021/22.

Local plans, and the indicators chosen to track progress in achieving these, will be developed in partnership with local communities and stakeholders. These plans will address local contexts and find solutions to relevant local needs while contributing to improvement on the high-level indicators.

The Ministry and the Health Quality & Safety Commission will work with the Health and Disability Review Transition Unit during 2021/22 to further develop the framework and ensure it complements overarching monitoring and accountability arrangements for the future health and disability system.

More information

The Government introduced the Health System Indicators framework in August 2021.

- Minister of Health Media Release – Health Indicators will track better care for all NZers:
www.beehive.govt.nz/release/health-indicators-will-track-better-care-all-nzers
- Speech to Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners:
www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/speech-royal-new-zealand-college-general-practitioners-conference-2021

Health Quality & Safety Commission

- Introduction to the health system indicators framework: reports.hqsc.govt.nz/HSI

How is the new framework different to the previous health targets?

In the past, New Zealand, like many developed countries, has used national targets, to set a minimum level of performance for processes (such as immunisation rates or wait times in ED) and monitored performance against this.

New Zealand's previous health targets were in place from July 2007 to 30 June 2020. The effects of health targets on system performance have been studied extensively over the last 15 years. Evidence in New Zealand and internationally has made it clear that having a small set of narrowly focused national targets can incentivise health sector organisations to improve in a single area, but do not consistently drive system-wide improvements.

As an alternative, the Health System Indicators framework uses very broad rather than targeted aims to track system functioning at a very high level. To be broad, the measures cannot be achieved by one body operating alone, project managing the achievement of a target. Instead, actions for improvement require a coalition of clinicians, consumers, communities and providers to work together. It also acknowledges that solutions are likely to vary between different communities.

What follows is a two-level framework: national aims delivered by local action.

The headline indicators are not accountability metrics for local health system players, but rather a way for the centre to provide an account to the public about progress against high-level aims. The focus of accountability for local services lies in the local plans and the indicators chosen to track progress in achieving these. The rationale is that achievement of local plans will make the required local contribution towards the national aims.

The new framework is just one of a number of tools for monitoring and supporting improvements to the performance of the health and disability system, including strengthened monitoring and accountability arrangements that will be delivered through the reforms.

DHBs will continue to report to the Ministry about their performance on the previous health targets, as part of their regular quarterly reporting processes.

Are Health Alliances still functioning?

Yes, while we have the current settings in place for this year (till 30 June 2022), we expect Alliances to continue working. The future of Alliances is still being worked through.

How does the new framework align with the Health and Disability System reforms?

A key focus of the Government's reforms of the health and disability system is to create a truly national health service that has a single standard of care, improves access for all New Zealanders, and empowers communities to develop services that are tailored to meet local needs.

The Health System Indicators framework pairs high-level national measures with local flexibility to put in place programmes and measures suitable for local contexts that contribute to improvement on those high-level measures. The framework's focus on local solutions and improving equity is aligned with the Government's strategic direction.

The Ministry and the Commission will work with the Transition Unit during 2021/22 to further develop the Health System Indicators framework and ensure it complements overarching monitoring and accountability arrangements for the health and disability system.

What about equity?

Data for all the high-level indicators (except financial performance) will be available by ethnicity, both nationally and (in due course) at a local level. Local programmes can then address the areas where we need to do better, especially for Māori and Pacific peoples.

The local actions to improve national performance will be developed in partnership with local communities and stakeholders to ensure they are fit for purpose and will be delivered in a way that works for Māori and Pacific communities.

Are there any examples of how this will work in practice?

To improve child wellbeing, we aim to have fewer children going to hospital for preventable conditions or those that could be managed through primary and community care.

Across the country, the factors that lead to children needing to go to hospital differs. For example, asthma and other respiratory problems may be more prevalent in one area, while oral health issues could be relatively more frequent in another.

This means in one place, actions could include ensuring children with asthma are receiving appropriate medicine and have an action plan to manage their asthma, for example, while in another locality the focus could be on increasing enrolments in oral health services.

The impact of the local actions will be monitored to see how they are improving performance on the high-level indicator (ambulatory sensitive hospitalisations for children).

Where monitoring reveals one group of children is being hospitalised more than another, the framework provides the flexibility for a new set of local actions to be developed with the community.

How will we report on the new framework?

Results for the Health System Indicators framework are published quarterly on a web-based dashboard hosted by the Commission: reports.hqsc.govt.nz/HSI

High-level indicators data for the quarter ending December 2019 has been published as baseline data. The initial data is at a national level only and includes a breakdown by ethnicity.

First quarter results for 2021/22 will be available in December 2021 for most indicators.

How will we know they are working – who will be held accountable for their success?

The new framework's high-level, national indicators correspond with the Government's priorities. They will develop over time and be adjusted as our needs and goals change to reflect the evolving priorities of New Zealand's health system.

At a national level, public reporting against the high-level indicators ensures those in central government are accountable to the public about how well the health system is progressing against the Government's priorities.

At a local level, achieving local plans will help 'move the dial' on the national high-level national indicators. Local health and disability services will be responsible for:

- developing and implementing plans, actions and measurable goals which are agreed with local communities and other stakeholders to meet their local needs and aspirations.
- demonstrating they have delivered on their local plans and the impact of this. Measures of local plans will be published alongside results for the high-level indicators on the web-based dashboard.

This separation of accountabilities fits well with the redesigned health system. Making local plans and measuring local successes will allow localities to provide accountability to the centre about how well it is implementing the national priorities in a way relevant to its population.



December 2021