



a healthier world through
sonographer expertise

Tuesday, 25 January 2022

Committee Secretariat
Finance and Expenditure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Submitted online only.

Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee: Budget Policy Statement (Budget 2022)

The Australasian Sonographers Association thanks the Finance and Expenditure Committee for the opportunity to respond to the Budget Policy Statement released on 15 December 2021.

About the Australasian Sonographers Association

The Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA) is the professional organisation for sonographers who provide the majority of medical diagnostic ultrasound examinations across New Zealand and Australia.

With over 7,000 members and a membership of more than 75% of Australasia's sonographers, the ASA has a significant role in supporting and advising the profession on the highest standards to provide the best possible outcomes in ultrasound for patients.

Feedback on the Budget Policy Statement

The ASA recognises the 2021 Budget Policy Statement (BPS)¹ continues proposed investment against the five wellbeing priorities (Just Transition, Physical and Mental Wellbeing, Future of Work, Māori and Pacific, and Child Wellbeing), guided by the Treasury's Living Standards Framework and the four capitals (Human, Natural, Social and Financial and Physical).

This year the BPS also has two policy areas of particular focus for Budget 2022. To embed the health reforms and progress towards emissions reduction goals, the first area of focus relating to the reforms announced earlier in 2021 – to replace district health boards (DHBs) with one national organisation (Health New Zealand) and establish a new Māori Health Authority and a dedicated Public Health Agency.

The ASA strongly supports the Government's commitment under the Budget 2022 to provide a significant further investment to establish these new entities on a sustainable footing and begin a staged delivery of the health system shifts envisaged through reform.

¹ 2021 Budget Policy Statement (Budget 2022). New Zealand Government. 15 Dec 2021

We also recognise that Budget 2022 will also begin the transition to multi-year funding for Vote Health to give public-funded health entities increased funding certainty and support longer-term planning for health services.

In delivering the goals of the BPS, the ASA strongly requests the Government invest in programs that address the following issues. Solutions to these issues are essential to meet the Government's Wellbeing priorities of Physical and Mental Health and the Future of Work.

1. Sonographer workforce shortage

Ultrasound is often a patient's first diagnostic imaging exam, either eliminating the need for or informing the use of other more expensive diagnostic imaging.

Patients need timely access to comprehensive medical diagnostic ultrasound for a range of health services, including pregnancy, diagnosing cancers and everything in between. The highly skilled sonographer profession provides the majority of the comprehensive diagnostic ultrasound services across the country.

There has been a national workforce shortage of sonographers for over a decade. This workforce shortage has grown over time and impacts our communities' timely access to services.^{2, 3}

Since 2012, the Government sought to support the DHBs to address this critical issue with support provided under the Sonographers Workforce Development Programme, which found a marginal increase in the sonographer workforce. However, it has been over seven years since substantive changes were made to the Health Workforce Funding Model in New Zealand⁴. The supply of sonographers is not keeping up with the demand for ultrasound services, which is increasing in both volume and complexity.⁵

This has been compounded by the recently reduced number of local graduates due to the cessation of the ASUM Diploma of Medical Ultrasound (DMU) in 2019, which traditionally accounted for more than half of all New Zealand graduates.

The ASA strongly recommends:

- **Addressing the critical sonographer workforce shortage is one of the first priorities of Health New Zealand; and**
- **The Budget 2022 support increased local sonographer education and clinical training.**

² Workforce shortage New Zealand. Australasian Sonographers Association website. Accessed Jan 2022 www.sonographers.org/advocacy/workforce-nz

³ Buckley B, Farnworth MJ, Whalley G. Echocardiography service provision in New Zealand: capacity modelling the cardiac sonographer workforce. *New Zealand Medical Journal*. 2016 Jan 8;129(1428):16-24.

⁴ Jenkins, M. Health Workforce Funding Review - Current State Report. Minister of Health, New Zealand. Sep 2020

⁵ Strategic Workforce Services. DHB Sonographer Workforce Assessment Report. Central Region's Technical Advisory Services. Mar 2016

2. Whole-of-industry working together

In the ASA's response to the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Bill consultation,⁶ we stated our support for these vital health system changes that the Government is progressing.

The ASA also asked the parliament to recognise that, to achieve the goal of these changes – *to provide for a new structure and new accountability arrangements for the publicly funded health system, in order to protect, promote, and improve the health of all New Zealanders*⁷ – all parts of the health system must be completely engaged in the changes.

Work to date has focused on health consumers, hospitals and the primary and community care sector in service planning. However, there needs to be increased recognition of the need to work with the private and non-government health services in planning and delivering health services across New Zealand.

Most New Zealand patients access medical diagnostic ultrasound services through private diagnostic imaging companies. A 2021 survey of New Zealand and Australian sonographers⁸ found that only 30% of New Zealand respondents were employed in a public hospital.

Embedding these health reforms is a primary focus of BPS. With 70% of sonographers working in private practice, it is essential that these changes to the health system formally recognise the role and importance of non-government health services in meeting the health service needs of people across New Zealand.

The ASA strongly recommends:

- **Greater engagement and involvement of private and non-government health services implementing these health system changes.**

3. Increase health workforce data accuracy and completeness.

Over the last decade, government data about the sonographer workforce has relied on information (e.g. service reported FTE and vacancy rates) from DHBs and other government services, or commissioned research, which has relied mainly on the same data sources. With 70% of the sonographer workforce employed in non-government businesses,⁸ this data does not provide a complete picture of the sonographer workforce or national/local service demand.

Demand for sonographer medical diagnostic ultrasound examinations has progressively increased in volume and complexity⁵ over the last few decades. As this growth is expected to continue, it will be increasingly crucial for the Government to have high-quality sonographer workforce data to inform future policy and expenditure supporting equitable access to medical diagnostic ultrasound.

Part of the reason that the ASA supports the health system changes⁶ is because of the strong potential that nationally centralised planning and data collection can support significant New Zealand health

⁶ ASA letter to the Committee Secretariat. Item of business: Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Bill. Australasian Sonographers Association 8 Dec 2021.

⁷ Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Bill. New Zealand Parliament website. Accessed Jan 2022
www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/BILL_116317/pae-ora-healthy-futures-bill

⁸ Survey Matters. 2021 Sonographer Employment and Salary Survey. Australian and New Zealand data. Australasian Sonographers Association. Nov 2021.

system improvements. Such as improved coordination of strategies to reduce the national workforce shortage of sonographers.

The ASA strongly recommends:

- **the Government prioritise the establishment of whole-of-health-system data collection for sonographers and other allied health profession workforce; and**
- **in the interest of transparency, the data is available publicly or on request.**

4. Mutual recognition of Australian trained sonographers for work in New Zealand

The BPS recognised that "*Border restrictions have had an impact on our human capital, decreasing net migration and impacting the availability of skills in some sectors*". This is particularly relevant to the sonographer workforce where, for the last decade, the Government has significantly targeted sonographer workforce migration from countries such as the UK and Canada.

However, the poor recognition of Australian sonographers for registration and practice in New Zealand continues to be a missed opportunity.

Despite an Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO 251214) for 'sonographer' in place, Australian trained sonographers interested in working in New Zealand must complete the standard overseas-trained applicant process.⁹

As borders reopen, the earliest permissible international travel will likely be with Australia. The Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement¹⁰ can allow the Government to streamline recognition of Australian trained sonographers to register and practice in New Zealand. Simplifying these processes is an easy step toward resolving the critical sonographer workforce shortage by increasing national access to the 7,022 qualified sonographers in Australia.¹¹

The ASA strongly recommends:

- **Improved recognition of the equivalency of Australian sonographers for registration and practice in New Zealand**

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Budget Policy Statement (Budget 2022). If you wish to talk to us about these recommendations or require additional information, don't hesitate to contact the ASA Policy Advisor, James Brooks-Dowsett, by phone at +61 406 998 429 or email to policy@sonographers.org.

⁹ Overseas Trained - How to Register. New Zealand Medical Radiation Practice Board website. Accessed Jan 2022 www.mrtboard.org.nz/pre-registration/overseas-trained-how-to-register

¹⁰ Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement. Accessed January 2022. www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/business/trade-and-tariffs/trade-agreements-and-partnerships/closer-economic-relations-with-australia-and-the-trans-tasman-mutual-recognition-arrangement/

¹¹ Accredited Medical Sonographers. 4th quarter report 2021. Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry. Oct 2021



We look forward to working with members of parliament and your representatives to ensure our communities have timely access to high quality medical diagnostic ultrasound.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Ian Schroen', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely,'.

Ian Schroen
President of the Board
Australasian Sonographers Association.