

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

Tuesday 18 July 2023

For Immediate Release

Medicines Act enables suspension of harmful surgical mesh procedures but will the Ministry of Health Act – there can be no more excuses for inaction!

The Auckland Women's Health Council, Federation of Women's Health Councils, The Cartwright Collective and Health Consumer Advocacy Alliance have joined forces to demand that the Government and Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora show some gumption and do what is necessary to stop the ongoing harm to hundreds of women/wāhine from surgical mesh procedures.

"We felt we had no option," says Auckland Women's Health Council representative, Sue Claridge "This is the latest in a long line of failures of our health authorities to act to prevent more harm from mesh surgery."

The four health advocacy organisations have come together to respond to the failure of the Health Committee to recommend an immediate suspension of mesh procedures, as requested by advocate for mesh injured women, [Sally Walker, in her 2022 petition](#). Instead, they have 'passed the buck' to the Ministry of Health, relevant medical colleges and the Medical Council of New Zealand, all of whom have repeatedly failed to take action to protect women from injury from surgical mesh.

Previously it has been claimed by those within the Government and Ministry of Health, including Chief Medical Officer Dr Joe Bourne in his oral submission to the Health Committee, that there is no legislative power to suspend mesh procedures. However, this is incorrect, and is either yet another means to equivocate or shows a lack of familiarity with the governing legislation.

Section 37 of the [Medicines Act 1981](#) empowers the Minister of Health to issue a notice prohibiting the administration or other use of medical devices of any specified kind for up to a year.

"A suspension will allow more time to action the fundamental changes required to help those already harmed, prevent others from being injured, and help keep New Zealand women safe," says women's health advocate and member of The Cartwright Collective, Sandra Coney.

Additionally, the Health Consumer Advocacy Alliance says that it is imperative that high vigilance scrutiny is placed on non-mesh pelvic procedures, until the proper upskilling of our current workforce has been undertaken and patient safety can be assured.

Section 37 of the Medicines Act 1981 can be used to implement a suspension for a year to give the Government time to create the legislation needed to be able to suspend mesh procedures and restrict practice. It is unconscionable to decide that a procedure or device is safe without having long term evidence of safety. It is unethical for the use of mesh to be allowed to continue because some people may benefit in the short to medium term, while others suffer health-destroying and life-changing injury.

"Last week the Government launched the Women's Health Strategy, yet the Ministry, Government and health entities continue to drag their feet on mesh harm, literally the biggest cause of avoidable medical injury in our women/wāhine since the Cartwright Inquiry. This failure to act makes a mockery of the Government's stated commitment to improving women's health and addressing the bias and inequities that women face in the health system," says Ms Claridge.

The Women's Health Strategy proudly touts the establishment of specialist mesh centres to remove mesh and address the harm caused by uro-gynaecological surgical mesh procedures, all while surgeons, many or most of whom are uncredentialed, continue to implant mesh and cause significant harm. If implantation

procedures are not stopped, these specialist mesh centres will be needed for years, imposing a huge financial burden on the health sector and ACC, as well as the personal, family/whānau and community burden as a result of mesh injury.

Mesh injured New Zealanders have again been forsaken by the very agencies that should be protecting them.

As long-time advocate for mesh injured women, Charlotte Korte said in her submission to the Health Committee, "It is no longer good enough to use the excuse that because some women seem fine after having this surgery, it is okay to leave others completely disabled with shattered lives, unable to function in everyday life."

It is not okay to leave any woman severely disabled through preventable medical injury. It is not okay for any woman to be irrevocably harmed.

"New Zealand women deserve better than this. Collateral damage on this scale from this international market is unacceptable. Such state sanctioned harm has got to stop," says co-convenor of the Federation of Women's Health Councils, Barbara Robson

"We call on the Ministry of Health to take strong and decisive action to protect the lives and health of New Zealand women, and impose an immediate suspension of surgical mesh procedures for stress urinary incontinence."

Auckland Women's Health Council
Federation of Women's Health Councils
The Cartwright Collective
Health Consumer Advocacy Alliance

ENDS

Media Contact:
Sue Claridge - 021 0263 3627

Petition of Sally Walker: Suspend the implantation of mesh sling for stress urinary incontinence, Report of the Health Committee:

<https://selectcommittees.parliament.nz/download/SelectCommitteeReport/7fe31ea9-9938-42d9-8662-08db78e3aca2>



The Auckland Women's Health Council is a voluntary organisation of individual women and women's groups who have an interest in and commitment to women's health issues. The organisation was formed in 1988 to provide a voice on women's health issues in the Auckland region.

The Council has a special interest in women's health, patient rights, informed consent and decision-making in health care, health consumer advocacy, the Code of Health Consumers' Rights, the National Cervical Screening Programme, and medical ethics – issues that were highlighted during the Inquiry into the treatment of cervical cancer at National Women's Hospital in 1987-88 and in the recommendations contained in the report known as the Cartwright Report.



The Federation of Women's Health Councils Aotearoa – New Zealand (FWHC) is a national umbrella organisation of women's health councils, women's health groups, and individual women throughout New Zealand. The Federation has a commitment to providing a powerful voice for women consumers of health and disability services, and to act as a public good advocate in matters that affect their well-being interests and those of their family/whānau.

The Cartwright Collective

The Collective is a group committed to monitoring implementation of the 1988 Cartwright Inquiry Report Recommendations. Members are also committed to ensuring policy development is based on sound evidence and to the provision of high-quality information to enable consumers to make informed decisions. The group also advocates to ensure the recommendations of the Cartwright Inquiry are not diluted and to provide a consumer voice in health care ethics.



The Health Consumer Advocacy Alliance is a collective of experienced healthcare advocates who share a common passion for creating positive, effective and lasting change. Our founders have a common standpoint; that health care as it is now is not working, that the experience of New Zealanders in the health system is not what it should be. By working together and pooling our experience we identify areas and opportunities where we can facilitate change

within the healthcare system and ensure that our voice, the consumer voice, is heard.