



Waitemata
District Health Board
Best Care for Everyone

DHB Board Office
15 Shea Terrace
Takapuna, Auckland 0622
Private Bag 93-503, Takapuna
North Shore City 0740
Telephone: 09 486 8900
Facsimile: 09 486 8924
www.waitemataadhb.govt.nz

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Dear 

Re: Official Information Act request - Number of assaults on health staff over the last three years

Thank you for your Official Information Act request, which was partially transferred to Waitemata District Health Board (DHB) from the Ministry of Health on 28 January 2019. Waitemata DHB is responding to questions 1-13, while the Ministry is responding directly to question 14.

Before responding to your questions, some contextual information about our population and our services may be useful and assist your understanding of the information provided.

Waitemata DHB serves the largest population of any district health board in New Zealand, currently standing at more than 630,000 people. There is a direct link between the size of our population and the significant scale of services we provide and the opportunity for aggression towards our staff.

Waitemata DHB has a workforce of more than 7500 staff spread across more than 80 sites. In addition to caring for our own population, we are also the metropolitan Auckland provider of forensic psychiatry, child disability services, child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

Ultimately, our employees deal with a broad cross-section of the community in their day-to-day work and this often involves reaching out to people when they are at their most vulnerable and anxious, including those with mental health conditions, which can result in unpredictable behaviours. Caution is, therefore, advised in comparing raw event numbers between different district health boards unless it is clear the breadth of service delivery and clinical caseload is of similar complexity.

Caution is further advised in the interpretation of 2018 aggression data provided in this response and in any attempt to compare this information with data provided by other healthcare providers. This is due to the implementation of a new reporting model at Waitemata DHB from March 2018 which better captures aggression incidents that have been reported as security events relating to patients and staff. To the uninitiated, this could incorrectly appear as a significant year-on-year increase in aggression incidents, whereas it signifies improved data and reporting.

Waitemata DHB encourages the reporting of assault and promotes a policy of ensuring that the safety and security of staff and patients is approached in line with our organisational values as follows:

Everyone Matters

We have a responsibility to be welcoming and respectful and to listen, while maintaining the personal safety of our staff. We will equip staff with strategies to manage care where behaviour is a concern, whether it is their own or the behaviour of others.

Our approach will be professional and consistent wherever care is delivered, be it in hospital, a community facility or at home.

We all have a responsibility to report risks and incidents and to take care of ourselves and others - to not walk by.

With Compassion

Safety and security initiatives will protect personal dignity and will be as unobtrusive as possible. If someone's behaviour compromises the safety of others, we will ensure a fair and balanced response. We will be attentive to people's individual circumstances and provide an opportunity for people to modify behaviour before using security measures.

Connected

All safety and security initiatives will link with our Engagement Strategy to make sure we stay connected to our community and colleagues. We will have clear boundaries for behaviour which are documented in straightforward terms and readily available to staff and the community. Security risks will be clearly communicated across services to enable team work and promote staff safety.

Better, Best, Brilliant

Security measures contribute to a safe, secure and supportive environment for everybody. We will continue to look for innovative ways to improve services and provide a positive experience for everyone.

As noted above, please be aware that Waitemata DHB changed our staff incident reporting system in March 2018. This improved the capture of staff and patient security incident-related data. The apparent spike in the number of events reported is not reflective of the growth in the actual number of assaults occurring within our services.

Our responses to your questions are provided below.

- 1. The overall number of recorded assaults on health service staff over the last three years to enable a year-by-year comparison.***

Calendar Year	Overall staff assaults
2016	160
2017	225

*Question 1 excludes Mental Health staff as this information is provided in response to question 3.

A new reporting system was implemented in 2018. Data from the new system cannot be compared with data from past years. The number of recorded assaults on health service staff under the new system in 2018 was 595.

2. *The overall number of incidents where health service staff and been threatened or verbally abused over the last three years to enable a year-by-year comparison.*

Calendar Year	Incidents related to verbal abuse or threats
2016	153
2017	211

*Question 2 excludes Mental Health staff as this information is provided in response to question 4.

A new reporting system was implemented in 2018. Data from the new system cannot be compared with data from past years. The number of recorded incidents in which health service staff were threatened or verbally abused was 565.

3. *The number of assaults on health service staff within the mental health field over the same time period.*

Calendar Year	Overall staff assaults in Specialist Mental Health and Addictions Services
2016	226
2017	248

A new reporting system was implemented in 2018. Data from the new system cannot be compared with data from past years. The number of recorded assaults on mental health service staff under the new system in 2018 was 271.

4. *The number of incidents where mental health staff have been threatened or verbally abused.*

Calendar Year	Incidents related to verbal abuse or threats in Specialist Mental Health and Addictions Services
2016	258
2017	184

A new reporting system was implemented in 2018. Data from the new system cannot be compared with data from past years. The number of recorded incidents where mental health service staff were verbally abused or threatened under the new system in 2018 was 281.

5. *The number of injuries sustained by health service staff over the last three years including those injured whilst working.*

Please note that Waitemata DHB operates the largest mental health service in New Zealand by volume of service-users seen. Any comparison of Waitemata DHB data with that of other providers needs to make appropriate allowances for clinical caseload and complexity.

Calendar Year	Number of ACC Assault Claims Health Service Staff
2016	13
2017	30
2018	30

*Question 5 excludes Mental Health staff as this information is provided in response to question 6.

6. *The number of injuries sustained by mental health staff over the last three years.*

Calendar Year	Number of ACC Assault Claims Mental Health Staff
2016	17
2017	24
2018	23

7. *The number of convictions against individuals who have assaulted health service staff over the last three years.*

Nil.

8. *The number of convictions against individuals who have assaulted mental health staff over the last three years.*

Nil.

9. *The number of individuals who have been sent to prison for assaulting health service staff.*

Nil.

10. *The number of individuals who have been sent to prison for assaulting mental health staff.*

Nil.

11. *The number of physical restraints required by health service staff to contain someone due to their aggressive/violent behaviour.*

In relation to Questions 11 and 12, service-users and patients are supported to manage their distress in a proactive manner without the use of restraint. Staff only apply restraint when all other interventions have been unsuccessful. Restraint will be applied for the shortest time possible to maintain safety for service-users, staff or others, in accordance with workplace violence prevention legislation and the Restraint Minimisation and Safe Practice Standards, NZS 8134.2.3:2008.

Year	Number of Restraints
2016	447
2017	430
2018	435

*Question 11 excludes Mental Health staff as this information is provided in response to question 12.

12. *The number of physical restraints required by mental health staff to contain someone due to their aggressive/violent behaviour.*

The table below shows an increase in restraint episodes over the last three years. This is likely associated with increased referrals to mental health services, increased acuity and occupancy of the adult inpatient mental health units and increased reporting accuracy.

Year	Restraint Episode
2016	393
2017	509

A new reporting system was implemented in 2018. Data from the new system cannot be compared with data from past years. The number of recorded physical restraints by mental health service staff under the new system in 2018 was 769.

Totals are for Waitemata DHB acute adult mental health inpatient units and older adult mental health inpatient units and also include the forensic psychiatry and community alcohol and drug services inpatient units, which Waitemata DHB operates on behalf of the four Northern Region DHBs – Northland, Auckland, Counties Manukau and our own population. Caution is advised in comparing this data with that provided by other DHBs due to the fact Waitemata DHB has sole responsibility for the provision of forensic services where patients can have extremely challenging behaviours. The complexity and size of this caseload distorts the data and renders any attempt at comparison with other providers as flawed.

13. *The number of times police have been called to assist with managing individuals who were exhibiting aggressive/violent behaviours.*

Waitemata DHB does not hold any data on police call-outs to assist or intervene in assaults in our adult mental health inpatient units. However, adult services advise anecdotally that calling the police is a rare event, which would only occur a few times each year – and usually only when there is a weapon involved.

Waitemata DHB, like other agencies across the state sector, supports the open disclosure of information to assist the public's understanding of how we are delivering publicly-funded healthcare. This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you feel that there are good reasons why your response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider this.

We hope this reply satisfies your request.

Yours sincerely



Fiona McCarthy
Director Human Resources
Waitemata District Health Board