
4 February 2022

Dear [REDACTED]

Re: OIA request – Northern Region Fertility Service

Thank you for your Official Information Act request received 11 January 2022 seeking information from Waitematā and Auckland District Health Boards (DHBs) about the Northern Region Fertility Service (NRFS) BMI eligibility requirement for men.

In response to your request, we are able to provide the following information on behalf of both Waitematā and Auckland DHBs:

1. I was hoping you could help provide me with some information on why the Northern Region Fertility Service (NRFS) requires men to be under a certain BMI (body mass index) to qualify for treatment?

The NRFS coordinates referrals for publicly funded fertility services for the Northern region, including Auckland, Waitematā, Counties Manukau and Northland DHB areas.

The NRFS is governed by an advisory group, the purpose of which is to:

- monitor, review and oversee regional fertility services
- provide a forum for addressing questions and issues related to the regional provision of fertility services
- ensure there is a coordinated approach to public fertility services
- review and monitor referral pathways
- review, improve and monitor consumer feedback.

Eligibility for publicly funded fertility services is based on current international evidence and includes both inclusion and exclusion criteria related to, for example, residence, age, BMI, substance use, duration of infertility and previous children. Current eligibility criteria for the Northern Region was published in October 2018 – see the link below:

<https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/fertility/northern-region-fertility-service-nrfs/>

Research has demonstrated that BMI is related to fertility outcomes. Men with high BMI have lower sperm count and poorer quality of sperm. See, for example, Michael L. Eisenberg, Sungduk Kim, Zhen Chen, Rajeshwari Sundaram, Enrique F. Schisterman, Germaine M. Buck Louis, The relationship between male BMI and waist circumference on semen quality: data from the LIFE study, *Human*

Accordingly, the NRFS determined that to be eligible for a first specialist appointment and fertility treatment, men are required to have a BMI less than 40, as outlined in the eligibility criteria:

- **Eligibility for first specialist appointment based on BMI:** Height and weight information must be included for both males and females in the fertility referral. Women must have a BMI ≤ 32 and men will not be eligible for publicly funded treatment until their BMI is < 40 .
- **Eligibility for treatment based on BMI:** A woman must have a BMI ≤ 32 to be eligible for publicly funded treatment. This is a healthy weight which increases the chance of having a successful pregnancy and healthy baby. She must also be clinically fit for fertility treatment and pregnancy. A man must have a BMI < 40 to be eligible for publicly funded treatment.

2. When was this requirement introduced?

The current eligibility criteria for the Northern region including Auckland, Waitematā, Northland and Counties Manukau DHB areas was published in October 2018.

3. Would the DHBs consider this a common reason for people to be denied fertility treatment?

We are unable to provide the information requested as data on denying first specialist appointments and fertility treatment based on BMI eligibility is not collated. Due to the sensitivity of this information, frontline clinical staff would need to review individual clinical files and it would not be appropriate to use a contractor to review the records. This would take the frontline staff away from their clinical work and prejudice our ability to provide core clinical services.

We have considered whether charging or extending the timeframe for responding to this aspect of your request would assist us in managing this work and have concluded it would not. We have, therefore, determined to refuse this element of your request under Section 18(f) of the Official Information Act due to substantial collation and research.

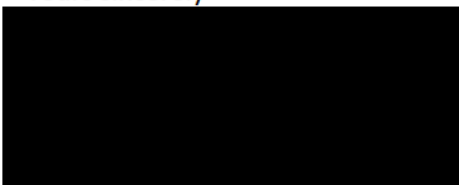
You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to seek a review is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

I trust that this information is helpful.

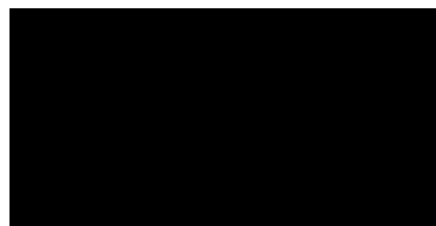
Waitematā and Auckland DHBs support the open disclosure of information to assist community understanding of how we are delivering publicly funded healthcare. This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

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

Yours sincerely



Acting Chief Executive Officer
Auckland District Health Board



Director Funding
Auckland and Waitematā DHBs