

Hon. Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response
By email: c.hipkins@ministers.govt.nz

Friday 8 October, 2021

Dear Minister,

RE: Physiotherapy

I write about your recent announcement of a three-stage transition for restrictions in Auckland. Several members of the public have approached me about how these restrictions apply to physiotherapy.

It appears that disallowing physiotherapy until stage 3 must be an oversight. Even though other medical professionals can currently see patients, physiotherapists are not considered an essential service and are unable to treat their patients until stage 3.

I say it must be an oversight, because under stage 1, outdoor yoga classes are permitted and under stage 2, public pools and shopping malls can open, before physiotherapists can.

Plainly, physiotherapy is more critical than yoga or retail therapy. As a yogi myself, it is not difficult to see how much more vital it is that people have rehabilitation post-surgery, and that their pinched nerves and injuries are seen to quickly for patient welfare and wellbeing.

Here are a couple of actual statements from physiotherapists and their patients that I have received in recent days since your announcement.

“Our patient’s health and rehabilitation are at risk the longer we stay closed. Assuming a move to stage two next week, you can go to the mall for retail therapy, pick up a coffee, drive to the beach for a picnic, go to the zoo, but have your ruptured Achilles injury seen? No.”

“Our clients’ health and well-being are being indefinitely kicked down the road with no timeline given. The subsequent health impacts will be long lasting. We have faced the longest lockdown in 18 months, and it looks likely to nearly double in duration. Facing 16 weeks of closure will be impossible to recover from. With this comes a reduced workforce and capacity to deal with a flood of delayed orthopaedic, musculoskeletal and neurological conditions that have all been put off.”

I have also spoken with a person asking to be able to see his physio. He is suffering from excruciating nerve pain, while still needing to function and work during the lockdown. He is averaging 3 hours of sleep per night and is concerned about long term nerve damage from being unable to get the therapy he needs.

My question to you is whether and by when you will change stage 1 and stage 2 to include physiotherapy as a permitted activity.

Obviously, the nature of physiotherapy is that the treatment is time sensitive. It is often applied to prevent degradation of a person's tissues and functions. In light of that, I'd greatly appreciate if you could reply at your earliest convenience so I can relay your decision to these affected members of the public.

Yours sincerely



Brooke van Velden
Deputy Leader and Health Spokesperson