

Selection for Admission to Medical School

Approved June 2021

This position statement replaces the NZMA's 2006 statement on medical student admission.

Background

1. Medical students are the future medical workforce. As such, selection for admission to medical school represents an important means of developing a medical workforce that is better equipped to meet society's needs.
2. Several sections of the population including Māori, Pacific peoples and those from rural communities are grossly under-represented in the current medical workforce. This is a result of historical and social inequities that prevent many sectors of the population from gaining access to educational opportunities like medical school.
3. There are compelling grounds for developing a medical workforce that better reflects the community it serves. Diversity of the medical workforce is beneficial for meeting the health needs of diverse populations. Mounting international evidence suggests that patients with the same racial or ethnic background as their doctor are likely to have better outcomes. Furthermore, the sociodemographic characteristics of health professional students influence future career choices in terms of place of practice and types of population served.
4. Addressing Māori health and health equity by measures such as increasing the numbers of Māori medical students is supported by both needs-based and rights-based arguments.
5. Universities, acting as agents of government, have an obligation to honour te Tiriti o Waitangi, including the responsibility to correct inequitable health outcomes experienced by Māori.

Position and Recommendations

1. The NZMA believes that medical schools in New Zealand should select and train medical students that are representative of, appropriate for, and sufficient in number for our population, taking into account current and future health and workforce needs.
2. The NZMA strongly supports affirmative action¹ selection policies to medical school that include, but are not limited to, increasing the numbers of Māori, Pacific peoples, those from rural communities, low socioeconomic and refugee backgrounds. These policies need to go

¹ Affirmative Action is defined as recognising membership of an under-represented group as a factor to be taken into account in addition to competence and merit; ie, all other things being equal, membership of an under-represented group will be taken into consideration. Affirmative Action aims to redress any identified imbalance of representation from under-represented groups that may be found and to break down barriers to equality of opportunity in employment and education.

beyond simply matching entry numbers to population proportions so that they deliver the representative medical workforce required to meet the future health needs of Aotearoa.

3. Universities should ensure appropriate partnership and consultation with groups that are affected when developing and refining affirmative action selection policies to medical school.
4. To the extent that is possible, universities should be transparent about how affirmative action selection policies work.
5. The NZMA supports equitable access to medical school programmes for applicants and students with a disability where this is possible, as part of inclusive medical education.²

² See the NZMA's Submission to Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand on Inclusive Medical Education. 11 February 2021. Available from <https://bit.ly/3fJXZEX>; Also see the Medical Council's Fitness for Registration. Available from <https://www.mcnz.org.nz/registration/getting-registered/how-to-register/fitness-for-registration/>