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## **Allied health workers – our wasted opportunity**

New Zealand's 30,000-strong Allied Health workforce holds the key to easing the enormous strain on GP services, co-Chair of Allied Health New Zealand Sandra Kirby says.

*Stuff* has reported today that pressures on family doctors have reached breaking point amid unprecedented demand, longer wait times for GP appointments, practices closing their books to new patients, and too few GPs coming in to replace those leaving.

"It is so frustrating that we keep missing the opportunity which is staring us in the face," Sandra Kirby says.

"The Royal New Zealand College of GPs is understandably troubled about the state of its workforce, and is calling for more trained nurses who are trained in allied health.

"Well, we already have that resource in the form of New Zealand's allied health professionals – the likes of dietitians, physiotherapists, counsellors and many others. Their work continues to be undervalued.

"For some time we have been imploring the government to make changes around how allied health services are accessed and funded, so that they're fully integrated into the system.

"Until that happens it is difficult to see how the systemic pressures outlined in the *Stuff* article today can begin to be addressed.

"Allied health workers make up the country's second biggest clinical workforce, but sadly their expertise, professionalism and dedication is not fully capitalised on.

"They could make a far greater contribution to the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders.

"By integrating such services into the system, we would cut overall health costs as fewer people would need hospital care for conditions that could be effectively managed at an earlier point.

"It would also deliver the 'truly nationwide approach' that Health Minister Andrew Little champions.

"The health and disability sector is undergoing its biggest revamp in a generation, so now is the time to act. It's not too late to do so," Sandra Kirby says.

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