



## **Allied Health staff shortages: the invisible damage of underfunding**

New Zealand's health system has more than 450 "missing" allied health workers - a reality just as damaging as the black mould and sewage in Middlemore Hospital's walls, the PSA says.

The latest figures from the Ministry of Health show there are 465 fewer Allied Health full-time equivalent employees than DHBs have forecast.

For the same period in 2017, there were 336 fewer.

"This increase is deeply concerning but it's sadly not a surprise to PSA members in Allied Health," PSA National Secretary Erin Polaczuk says.

"For years now we've been hearing stories of the consequences of underfunding: staff constantly working double shifts, cancelling annual leave, drowning in work.

"Our members are stressed, overworked and exhausted, and they say this is having an impact on their ability to deliver quality care."

PSA members say patients are facing longer wait times and are being asked to travel to receive services they should be able to access locally.

"For example, there are at least 10 vacancies in audiology at present - out of around 60 funded positions.

"Patients currently face a 12-month waiting list in some areas, leading to delays in diagnosis and management of hearing loss.

"We're told some DHBs are not accepting referrals for hearing aids or Auditory Processing Disorder - which can lead to those patients missing out if they can't afford private healthcare."

The PSA's 2017 election campaign highlighted the number of workers "missing" from the health system due to underfunding, and Ms Polaczuk says that number is still rising.

"This shows the crisis in health underfunding cannot be turned around immediately - and nor can it be done from within existing baseline funding.

"The PSA urges the government to relax its Budget Responsibility Rules in order to address the gaps in funding.

"The sewage and black mould in the walls of Middlemore Hospital is a very visible sign of National's failings - our members' stress is invisible, but just as damaging."