

27 October 2016

Chai Chuah
Director-General
Ministry of Health
PO Box 5013
WELLINGTON

Dear Chai

I felt it necessary to contact you this morning regarding the unwarranted media scrutiny Housing New Zealand is today facing following the Ministry of Health's release of the recommended new methamphetamine guidelines yesterday.

We are this morning fielding numerous enquiries about factually incorrect comments being reported by Radio New Zealand. In particular, it has been stated that:

- The Ministry of Health had repeatedly warned Housing New Zealand that it was misusing the guidelines.

And, as a result:

- Other stakeholders have extrapolated this to mean that Housing New Zealand has consequently been wrongly evicting or penalising tenants.

Both points are without basis. The Ministry of Health has not issued 'repeated warnings' to Housing New Zealand, or the wider industry, about any need to apply the guidelines only to properties where methamphetamine has been manufactured.

With regard to the second point, we end tenancies in relation to methamphetamine because the presence of the drug in our homes indicates use or manufacture – both illegal activities that are a clear and direct breach of our Tenancy Agreement. Both activities also jeopardise the safety of our properties, and our current and future tenants.

For six years all property owners, including Housing New Zealand, have had only one set of guidelines to use in determining the health and safety of our properties when we are testing and remediating. And we have applied those guidelines because we are obliged to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the tenants who move into our properties, as well as our staff and contractors who visit those properties. We have also actively advocated for a review of the guidelines and welcomed the new parameters that were announced yesterday.

Housing New Zealand takes any criticism of its methamphetamine programme seriously. For some time now, we have deployed resources in a range of areas to address the matter of methamphetamine in our homes and communities.

We view the new guidelines as a positive step in the right direction in tackling this complex issue. But it is disappointing that a more collaborative approach could not have been taken to prevent the type of media coverage we are seeing this morning.

Could you please review the comments that have been made and let me know how we can address and rectify the current, inaccurate statements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A.J. McKenzie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew McKenzie
Chief Executive

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

Email

From: Chai_Chuah@moh.govt.nz
To: Andrew McKenzie
CC: stewart_jessamine@moh.govt.nz ; Robyn Mathewson
Subject:Media coverage and follow up

Sent:28/10/2016 9:54:00 AM



Dear Andrew

Thank you for your letter today.

Thanks also for raising your concerns with me directly about the media coverage.

As discussed at our phone conversation yesterday afternoon, the Ministry, in any statements to the media, has been very clear that any media response on interpretation and use of our guidelines, needs to be referred to the agencies concerned.

We have already raised the issue of inaccurate attribution of the comment that Housing NZ was 'misusing' our guidelines with Radio New Zealand. We have strengthened that following our discussion.

The Ministry asked that the incorrect attribution of that comment to the Ministry's Director Regulation, Protection and Assurance Dr Stewart Jessamine be rectified and one part of the story has been corrected. We are seeking further correction.

We remain committed to continue to work constructively and collaboratively with Housing New Zealand on issues of importance to both of us. Our Media Relations Manager Peter Abernethy will be in contact with Justine Banfield about further media interest.

Thank you again for raising this matter directly with me. As I offered yesterday my team are very interested in working with you jointly, particularly in dealing with media issues where we are both significantly involved.

Regards

Chai

Chai Chuah
Director-General of Health
Ministry of Health
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