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Statement from the Minister of Health Dr David Clark

Hon Dr David Clark

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This morning I have formally tendered my resignation as Minister of Health, which was accepted by the Prime Minister.

Serving as Minister of Health has been an absolute privilege – particularly through these extraordinary last few months.

It's no secret that Health is a challenging portfolio. I have given it my all.

But it has become increasingly clear to me that my continuation in the role is detracting from the Government's overall response to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.

You will recall that I offered my resignation during the Level Four lockdown in response to mistakes I made in a personal capacity.

The Prime Minister made it clear at the time - that under normal circumstances - she would have accepted that resignation, but she did not want significant disruption to the health system in the middle of the emergency response.

I've always taken the view that the interests of the team must come first, and New Zealand's COVID response is simply too important, so I have made the call that it is best for me to stand aside.

We have now shifted to a more stable footing with no evidence of community transmission with the focus shifting to containing the virus at the border, it is appropriate for me to move on.

I could not be more impressed with how New Zealanders and our health system responded to COVID-

The response from health workers at the frontline has been astonishing, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all the medical, nursing and allied health staff who put themselves on the line to keep us all safe.

Alongside the sacrifices made by ordinary New Zealanders, your combined efforts have put us in a position that is the envy of the world.

The results do speak for themselves.

In global terms our low hospitalisation and mortality rate is a testament to the strength of our health system and its workers.

Despite more than 80,000 tests in the past two weeks, the only cases we are identifying are at our borders.

That is how the system is supposed to work.

Because it has worked, we are now on a more stable footing. New Zealand's health system continues to build capacity to keep the virus at bay.

Now is the right time to hand over the reins, and move forward with new leadership.

It has been a privilege to serve in this role and lead the work to rebuild our public health system.

We have made record investments in funding for DHBs, record investments in capital spending to rebuild our run-down hospitals and health facilities.

We've made doctors' visits cheaper for more than half a million Kiwis and free up to the age of 14.

We've made historic investments into our mental health services, including sorting out pay for mental health support workers.

We have hired more than 2000 more nurses – and increased their pay.

We've established the Cancer Control Agency, Te Aho o te Kahu - quite aside from the day to day challenges in managing the system, these are significant achievements.

It has been a busy but rewarding three years and I leave the role proud of all that we have achieved in that time.

But it has not always been plain sailing and I wish to put on record again that I take full responsibility for the decisions made and taken during my time as Minister of Health.

Although ministers are generally advised against being publicly effusive about public servants, I want to again put on the record that it has been an honour to work alongside an exceptional Director-General in Dr Ashley Bloomfield.

Thank you Ashley and your team for the extraordinary work you have done for our country during our most serious health crisis in over a century.

The time is now right to hand over to another Minister to drive forward the changes proposed in the Health and Disability System Review ably led by Heather Simpson.

It is my sincere hope that a re-elected Labour-led Government will drive forward that agenda and that we continue to build a health service that is available and accessible to all New Zealanders, no matter who they are, where they are, or how deep their pocket.

Before I take your questions, let me answer one of them in advance.

With this decision comes the freedom to spend more time serving as a constituent MP.

I remain committed to the Labour Party, and to my electorate. So come the General Election on September 19 I will again be asking the people of Dunedin for their continued support to serve them as their local MP.



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