

Critical Health Infrastructure Upgrades 22 January 2021

It has been almost a year since the advent of COVID-19 saw Rarotonga Hospital's Out-Patients and Emergency Department (OPED) services moved to the Tupapa Community Clinic in March 2020.

Since that time, upgrades to the country's critical health infrastructure have continued at pace, both on Rarotonga and the Pa Enuā.

Recently completed renovations at Rarotonga Hospital include an electrical wiring upgrade and new oxygen plant (which together cost >\$650,000), in addition to the establishment of a 32-bed COVID-19 isolation ward after OPED services were moved to Tupapa.

The hospital now has two negative pressure rooms (four-bed and six-bed) that can be used to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients as well as a host of other potentially fatal infectious illnesses.

Further major works in progress include a CT scan outfit (\$1.3million), the creation of a mental health facility (almost \$1million), and upgrades to the Ministry of Health's Information Communication Technology (ICT) systems (nearly \$1million).

Commissioning a CT scanner at Rarotonga Hospital will greatly enhance how our medical staff determine what is wrong with some critically ill individuals, allowing them to prescribe effective treatment. The machine is also expected to save money by reducing medical transfers to New Zealand and minimising adverse social impacts on patients and their caregivers or families, while at the same time saving lives through early diagnosis. This will also allow better diagnosis and treatment of confirmed COVID-19 cases, including their management post-recovery.

Last year Te Marae Ora expanded the mental health workforce by engaging health care assistants to assist a doctor, one psychologist and a specialist nurse care for people with mental health needs. A new four-bed mental health facility is in the design phases to provide a safe, purpose-built environment where patients can receive appropriate treatment before returning to their families and communities.

And the ICT upgrade to infrastructure, hardware and software includes a new Patient Information Management System (PIMS), Laboratory Information Management system (LIMS) and Picture Archiving Computer (PAC) system for radiological imaging critical to clinical management.

At the new Tupapa Primary Care Centre of Excellence with emergency services - road and parking space upgrades have increased physical access to the facility, which has also been refurbished to improve patient flow, infection prevention and control measures, staff amenities, supported by a standalone tent for assessing any suspected COVID-19 cases.

Since July 2020, primary healthcare services were expanded through 10 community health clinics in each Puna on Rarotonga, two of which are using mobile bus services for their doctor visits.

The clinics are staffed by nurses and community health workers, with weekly doctor visits, and include oral health and mental health services. Pharmaceuticals and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies are delivered to each clinic during the week.

Government funds have refurbished three community health clinics and plans are in place to secure funding to refurbish the remaining seven clinics.

In the Pa Enuā, work on Pukapuka's new hospital is nearing completion. The new facilities include dedicated wards for men and women, a maternity ward, a dental office, administrative offices, and a storeroom. Work is also commencing to construct a health centre in Penrhyn.

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