

Joint Statement: Ethical Concerns regarding the Vaccine Mandates

The New Zealand Psychological Society, New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists and the New Zealand Psychologists Board have heard from a small number of psychologists with concerns that the COVID-19 vaccine mandates may contravene human rights, and/or the Code of Ethics.

The New Zealand Psychological Society, College of Clinical Psychologists and the Psychologists Board support the role of vaccination as a public health and social justice measure. We agree that vaccination plays a critical role in protecting the health of the New Zealand public by reducing the community risk of acquiring and further transmitting COVID-19. We believe that all health workers, including psychologists, should get vaccinated for their own health, and to protect their colleagues, families, residents of long-term care or incarceration facilities, and clients. This is especially necessary to protect those who are vulnerable, including unvaccinated children and the immunocompromised.

We understand that the position taken by the government may have been found to be challenging by some people. However, we have an ethical and professional obligation to protect and promote the health of clients and the public, and to participate in broader based community health efforts. We acknowledge the historical mistrust of health care institutions, including among some in our own health care workforce.

We recognise that there is a complex balance between individual rights and public health and safety within which measures such as restrictions and mandates sit. Our ethical principles recognise the difficult balance that must sometimes be drawn between these considerations. However, the Code of Ethics, when used to discuss an issue of national significance, must be viewed in its entirety –

1. respect for the dignity of persons and peoples / te whakanui i te mana o te tangata o ngā iwi hoki
2. responsible caring / te atawhai whai haepapa;
3. integrity in relationships/ te ngākau tapatahi i ngā hononga, and
4. social justice and responsibility te mana pāpori me te haepapa ki te porihanga

The Code refers to the work undertaken by psychologists in relation to their clients or communities that takes an individual and collective rights-based approach. In the face of mounting public health risk, the collective rights of the community must be balanced with individual right to refuse treatment. The vaccine mandates may impact on some people in their own work roles, but does not alter the ways in which psychologists should be acting in their work with their clients. Psychologists should continue to respect the ethical, cultural and legal rights of their clients in a mana-enhancing way that maintains relationships, and dignity for all.

Psychologists who hold a personal view opposing the Covid vaccination must be careful to ensure they do not discourage their clients from receiving vaccination.

Further information here...

<https://www.nzccp.co.nz/covid-19-information-and-resources/>

<https://www.psychology.org.nz/public/community-resources/covid-19-resources/>

<https://psychologistsboard.org.nz/for-practitioners/covid-19/>