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Health committee gives suggestion to boost NZ's choking clinical trials sector

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New Zealand's Health Committee submitted a 62-page report to New Zealand's Parliament making necessary recommendations to improve the existing clinical trials industry. The committee made 54 recommendations, comprising eight key recommendations and 46 detailed recommendations.

The report, titled 'Inquiry into improving New Zealand's environment to support innovation through clinical trials', made detailed recommendations so as to strengthen the clinical trials industry, which has a lot of potential.

Dr Paul Hutchison, chair, Health Select Committee, said the inquiry was initiated "because of concerns that New Zealand had lost its advantage as a good place to carry out clinical trials". "Most submissions we received backed up this view and called for improvement. The main elements of the system can be put right at almost no cost, and we believe the returns for New Zealand patients, the health service, and the economy will be significant," he said.

The eight key suggestions made in the report were:
1) The government should implement the recommendations of the report in order to achieve internationally competitive ethical review processes, holding patients' safety paramount; a simple process for the ethical and scientific review of single and multi-centre trials; and internationally cost-competitive services. This was led by the Ministry of Health, and has been completed.

2) The government monitor, as a performance measure, the time taken by Health and Disability Ethics Committees to process applications. The committees should process expedited reviews within 30 calendar days and other applications within 45 calendar days.

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3) The government requires the ethics committees to meet as frequently as needed to achieve best-practice timeliness.

4) The government should establish comprehensive standardized operating procedures for Health and Disability Ethics Committees to ensure consistency in decision-making within and between ethics committees.

5) The government should establish appropriate and sustainable infrastructure to support clinical trials.

6) The government should encourage clinicians to undertake clinical research through incentives or funding, and make provision for them to receive incentives similar to those available to university researchers.

7) The government should implement a system of electronic submissions of clinical trial applications to make the application process more efficient, within 12 months of this report being presented.

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8) The government should establish a strong collaborative framework between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Science and Innovation, Ministry of Economic Development, and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise to coordinate and promote as efficiently as possible clinical trial activity in New Zealand, through both the public and private systems, to assist personal health as well as economic growth.

Moreover, there should be a progress report to the government within nine months of this report being presented and the framework should be achieved within 12 months of this report being presented.

The Health Select Committee is confident that if the recommendations that have been mentioned in its report are implemented, then New Zealand's clinical trials sector will emerge as one of the most revenue earning domains in the country's life science industry.