

12 May 2022



Dear 

**Re: OIA requests – Assaults on staff**

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act received 06 April 2022 seeking information from Waitematā District Health Board (DHB) about assaults on staff.

Your original request was:

**The number of assaults on staff for years 2018,2019,2020,2021, 2022 (to current date)**

- **Could I please have this broken down into minor, moderate, and serious assaults**
- **Could I please have this broken down into physical and sexual assaults**
- **For the assaults deemed moderate and serious, could I please have further details about what role the staff member holds (e.g. nurse, orderly etc.), their gender, where they work, if the assault involved a weapon (please specify what the weapon was), what injuries were sustained, and what action was taken as a result (e.g. charges laid, etc.).**
- **Could I also please have a copy of any reports or documents relating to assaults and violence towards staff published in 2020 or 2021?**

On 6 April 2022, we contacted you to narrow the scope of your request in regard to the date range. As explained, in 2018 a new reporting system was implemented. Data from the new system cannot be compared with data from past years. The number of recorded assaults on health service staff under the new system in 2018 was 595. We also sent you several links to previous OIA requests regarding assaults. On 11 April 2022, you confirmed that you would narrow the scope of the request to report on physical assaults on staff for years **2019-2022 to date** and question 5 was re-worded.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context about our services.

Waitematā is the largest and one of the most rapidly growing DHBs in the country, serving a population the district, employing more than 8,900 people across more than 80 locations.

In addition to providing care to our own resident population, we are the Northern Region provider of forensic mental health services and child rehabilitation services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

Our employees deal with a broad cross-section of the community in their day-to-day work and this often involves reaching out to people when they are at their most vulnerable and anxious, which can result in unpredictable behaviours. Therefore, caution is advised in comparing raw event numbers between different district health boards unless it is clear the breadth of service-delivery and clinical caseload is of similar complexity.

Waitematā DHB encourages the reporting of assaults or inappropriate behaviour and promotes a policy of ensuring that the safety and security of staff and patients is approached in-line with our organisational values, which can be found on our website: <http://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/about-us/our-promise-values/>

In response to your request following narrowing the scope, we are able to provide the following information:

- 1. The number of assaults on staff for years 2019 to 2022 (to current date).**
- 2. Could I please have this broken down into minor, moderate and serious assaults?**

We are providing a combined response as below to Questions 1 and 2. It should be noted that in approximately 98% of cases, there is no intent to cause harm. Events recorded as ‘assaults’ on staff can often occur incidental to the treatment of often unwell and distressed patients.

In line with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, the severity ratings (low, medium, high) that are assigned to health and safety incidents are based on the ‘potential for harm’, rather than the ‘actual harm’ caused. This means that incidents marked as medium or high may not have resulted in any harm to the worker. However, due to the specifics surrounding the event, the potential for harm is categorised accordingly.

<b>Number of assaults on Waitematā DHB staff from 2019 to 2022 (year-to-date)</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Question 1 - Total number of physical assaults</b>	<b>Question 2 - Level of severity</b>		
		<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2021 (1 Jan 2021 – 27 Nov 2021)</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Change in reporting software (29 Nov 2021) : 30 Nov 2021 – 30 Dec 2021*</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2022 (as at 11/4/2022)</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>

\*Lower numbers of reported assaults on staff throughout 2020 and 2021 may be reflective of the lockdown periods in Auckland during this time when fewer patients were coming in to our hospitals and facilities.

### **3. Could I please have this broken down into physical and sexual assaults**

We record any sexual assaults as ‘physical assaults’. The numbers provided in the above table are all ‘physical assaults’.

To provide the number of sexual assaults we would need to individually review each incident. This would require significant collation, which we estimate would take approximately 14 days.

Completing this work would take key staff away from their core duties.

Due to the sensitivity of this information, key DHB staff would need to review individual personnel files and it would not be appropriate to use a contractor to review the records.

We have considered whether charging for the work involved or extending the time for responding to your request would allow us to provide the numbers of sexual assaults but have concluded that it would not. The work would still need to be done by our front-line staff and would compromise our ability to provide core services. We are, therefore, refusing this aspect of your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act due to substantial collation or research.

4. For the assaults deemed moderate and serious, could I please have further details about what role the staff member holds (e.g. nurse, orderly etc.), their gender, where they work, if the assault involved a weapon (please specify what the weapon was), what injuries were sustained, and what action was taken as a result (e.g. charges laid, etc.).

We contacted you on 10 May to advise that we do not collect data on the gender of the staff members, injuries sustained and any actions taken in a single database.

While we considered declining this aspect of your request due to substantial collation or research, we have assessed the amount of hours to undertake the collation of the information from separate databases and determined that we can provide a response, if the timeframe for doing so is extended.

Therefore, as required by section 15(1) of the Official Information Act 1982, we are writing to advise that we have decided we will release the information to you as you have requested.

However, as our clinicians, managers and staff are currently focused on managing our response to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks in the region and other urgent work, we have limited capacity to respond and completing this work will divert key staff away from their core duties.

We will endeavour to provide you with information about gender of the staff members, injuries sustained and any actions taken by 7 June.

In the meantime, we are able to provide information about staff members' roles. Please note, there was a change in reporting systems at the end of 2021, so data from late November 2021 includes the staff role and is reported below. Prior to this change, staff members' positions were not recorded.

Where numbers are fewer than five, we are withholding the exact number under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

<b>Assaults on Waitematā DHB staff members by role from 29 November 2021</b>		
<b>From 29 November 2021 (change of reporting systems)</b>	<b>Medium - no weapon</b>	<b>Severe - no weapon</b>
Enrolled Nurse (EN), Healthcare Assistant (HCA) or Scientific & Technical staff	≤5	0
Registered Nurse (RN)	12	0

#### 5. Reports or documents presented by your HR division to the Board in this timeframe.

A Health, Safety and Wellbeing Performance report is presented at each Board meeting. Note that due to COVID-19 lockdowns, some meetings were either cancelled or were held with reduced agenda items and so there was no Health and Safety report.

Copies of the reports presented to the Board from 2019 to February 2022 are published online and can be found in each Board report in the section headed: "Health and Safety Performance Report".

Links to each relevant Board report on our website are provided as follows:

**2019** – March, April, May, July, August, October, November, December

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/Board-Open-March-2019.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/Open-Board-Agenda-April-2019.pdf>

<http://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/Board-Open-29-05-19.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/Open-Board-Agenda-10-07-19.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/August-2019-Open-Board-Meeting-Agenda-reduced190819.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/Oct-2019-Open-Agenda-Full.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/November-2019-Open-Board-Agenda.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2019/WDHB-Open-Board-Meeting-Dec-2019.pdf>

**2020 – February, May, July, August, September, November, December**

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Open-Board-Agenda-Feb20.pdf.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Open-Board-27.05.20.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Open-Board-Agenda-08July20.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Open-Board-19.08.20.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Open-Board-Agenda-Sep-2020.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Agenda-Board-111120.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2020/Board-161220.pdf>

**2021 – February, March, April, June, July, October (link dated 150921), November, December**

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Open-Board-Agenda-10.02.21.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Open-Board-Agenda-10.03.21.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Open-Board-Agenda-21.04.21.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Board-Open.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Board-140721.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Board-150921.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Board-171121.pdf>

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2021/Open-Board-December-2021.pdf>

**2022 – February**

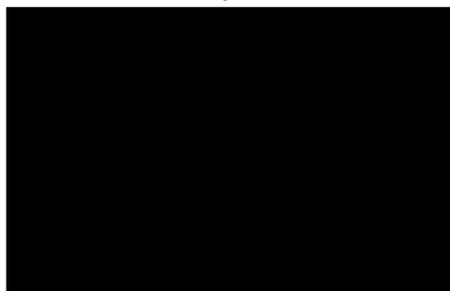
<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/assets/Documents/board/2022/Board-open-agenda-16.02.22.pdf>

I trust that the information we have been able to provide is helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of the decisions made in providing this response. Information about how to seek a review is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Waitematā DHB supports the open disclosure of information to assist community understanding of how we are delivering publicly funded healthcare. This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider your views.

Yours sincerely



**Director People and Culture  
Waitematā District Health Board**