

11 February 2025

Hon Simeon Brown

Minister of Health

Dear Minister

We write on behalf of the New Zealand Trauma Sub-Committee to express our strong opposition to the potential reintroduction of Military-Style Semi-Automatic (MSSA) weapons in Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ). The tragic mass shooting in Christchurch in March 2019, which resulted in the loss of 51 lives, serves as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of gun violence and underscores the need for stringent gun control measures to protect our communities.

Since the Christchurch tragedy, significant progress has been made in tightening our gun laws. The swift actions taken by then Prime Minister Dame Jacinda Ardern to implement a near-total ban on MSSAs and high-capacity magazines, alongside the establishment of the Firearms Safety Authority, were essential steps supported by the public. Reintroducing MSSA weapons would not only undermine these critical measures but could also lead to an increase in gun-related violence, as evidenced by similar experiences in other countries.

The evidence is clear: countries that prioritise collective safety over individual gun rights experience lower rates of gun violence. There is also evidence to show decrease in accidental firearms death and suicide by firearms (1). A study from Arizona showed that children living in states with non-strict firearms laws have a statistically significant increase in accidental and self-inflicted gun related injuries compared to those who lived in states with strict firearms laws (2). Stricter laws had a 28% decrease in firearm related injury and a statistically significant decrease in mortality in USA (3). While we do not have any published scientific data in New Zealand yet, evidence in countries with comparable socioeconomic state is overwhelming in favour of stricter gun control laws. -We urge you to consider the implications of reintroducing MSSAs and to recognise that such a move would contradict the progress we have made in enhancing public safety. The focus should remain on reducing gun-related harm, not on returning to a more permissive era of gun ownership.

Furthermore, the prevalence of illegal firearms in circulation presents significant challenges to public safety. Many gun-related crimes are committed by unlicensed gun owners, and our understanding of the scale and origin of these illegal firearms is inadequate. Establishing a comprehensive gun registry is essential for improving visibility and enabling targeted interventions to reduce access to unlicensed guns.

We implore you to enhance gun licensing and registration requirements, close loopholes that facilitate illicit transactions, and impose stricter penalties for non-compliance. Additionally, refining screening protocols for gun license applicants and fostering collaboration among government agencies, healthcare providers, and law enforcement are vital steps to prevent at-risk individuals from accessing firearms.

Addressing underlying factors contributing to violence, such as poverty and social alienation, is equally crucial. Gun-related harm disproportionately affects marginalised communities, including Māori and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. By tackling these root causes, we can work toward a safer society for all.

In conclusion, we strongly oppose any reintroduction of MSSA weapons and urge you to maintain and strengthen our existing gun control measures. The medical community stands united in advocating for policies that prioritise public safety and prevent future tragedies. By



focusing on illegal firearms, enhancing mental health support, and addressing social issues, we can create a safer New Zealand.

Thank you for considering our perspectives on this vital issue. We look forward to your response and the opportunity to work collaboratively for the safety of our communities.

Yours sincerely

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Member
Aotearoa New Zealand Trauma Sub-Committee

Dr Chris Wakeman, FRACS
Chair
Aotearoa New Zealand Trauma Sub-Committee

Dr Ros Pochin, FRACS
Chair
Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee

Letter also sent to:

- Hon Nicole McKee, Associate Minister of Justice (Firearms)
- Hon Mark Mitchell, Minister of Police
- Hon James Meager, Minister for Hunting and Fishing

Reference pdfs attached:

1. Injury Prevention 2006;12:365–372. doi: 10.1136/ip.2006.013714
2. J Trauma Acute Care Surg. 2014;76: 146Y151
3. J Inj Violence Res. 2018 Jan; 10(1): 11-16