

Review protested

Anger over a review of Maori health providers in Awakairangi spilled over at the Hutt Valley District Health Board meeting on Friday morning.

More than 100 marae, health and community group representatives packed the boardroom, and made allegations of unfairness and "institutional racism".

The DHB had sent out letters to Maori health providers announcing a review, and also warning that their funding contracts could be affected. Noeline Smiler, who chairs the DHB's Maori Health Service Development Group, said Maori providers were feeling undervalued and had refused to have input on the board's strategic plan.

It was "demeaning" and "institutional racism" that only Maori health providers were being included in the review, and the failure over the past four years to establish a Maori Partnership Board at governance level was "disappointing to put it mildly".

Iris Pahau, a former DHB member, also alleged that threatened funding cuts to Maori providers – which make up less than 1 per cent of the DHB's total spend – were punitive and racist.

The DHB had said it was concerned by the appalling health statistics of Maori in the Hutt Valley but it seemed to be making the Maori providers accountable for that, while not throwing the same focus on hospital and wider community-



DHB challenged: Noeline Smiler, one of the spokespeople for Maori health providers in the Hutt Valley, said a funding and services review was unfair and racist.

based services that serve local iwi and all other people, Pahau said.

Recommendations calling for a stop to the review and to establish a Maori Partnership board in the Hutt Valley by December 31 were tabled.

But even that was disputed.

Maraea Ropata, from Waiwhetu Marae, said such partnerships in the past had not worked. She suggested it was time Maori providers went a separate way to look after iwi, and used funding from government in the way they thought was best for their people.

Teresa Olsen, from Kokiri Seaview, said a threatened cut of \$123,000 to her organisation, and other examples such as \$20,000 from Maori respiratory services group Tu Kotahi Maori Astham Trust, and \$130,000 from Naku Enei Tamaraki, were not only deep but in some

cases would result in closure of the providers.

Board chair Virginia Hope said she and fellow members had "heard your message loud and clear. We are all responsible for Maori health, we don't think we are doing well enough across the board and this has been troubling us."

Talk over re-establishment of a Maori Partnership Board had taken a long time because the board wanted a model that would "get real traction" and progress.

Both the Hutt Valley and Capital & Coast DHBs had invested in significant new hospital buildings in recent years "and that always provides challenges [in terms of pressure on budgets] in the short term."

Hope pledged to respond to the Maori providers on how the board will address their concerns.