

## Census stuff-up supports case for greater GP access in the Sounds, trust says Sophie Trigger12:20, Oct 24 2019

A rural Marlborough community fighting for better access to GPs is hopeful a census botch up may work in its favour.

The Pelorus Area Health Trust (PAHT) had been awaiting on census figures to deliver a petition calling for greater access to medical services for its rural patients.

PAHT Chair Roz Freeth said reports of mis-counted dwellings in the Sounds could mean there were more residents unable to access a GP than the figures showed.

"It's starting to produce a big picture of this whole community of people that are under the radar and aren't able to access the sort of services that we all consider a right."

The Pelorus Area - including Havelock and the Pelorus Sounds - has a population estimated at about 3000 - however only 1300 are enrolled with a GP.

The Havelock Medical Centre operated five days a week until the resident GP moved on in 2006. It was then bought by Springlands Health Clinic, who operate out of Havelock two days a week.



*Roz Freeth (left) and Jenny Garing from the Pelorus Area Health Trust say the missing dwellings in the census count will work in their favour.*

The petition, launched last year, addressed two concerns: the limited days of GP service offered each week in Havelock and the fact that many residents were unable to sign onto a GP practice due to full books.

Stats NZ recently apologised for missing about 1000 houses in Marlborough in the census figures released last month, about 700 of which were in the "relatively isolated" Marlborough Sounds.

A Stats NZ spokesperson estimated that between 23 per cent and 70 per cent of the uncounted dwellings were potentially in the Pelorus Area.

Freeth said since the petition closed in March, the GP hours in Havelock had dipped below two days a week.



*Roz Freeth (right) said the Trust was "disappointed" the census had not been able to provide more definite figures.*

"We were consistently having a two day service a week prior to the end of last year, and that situation is no longer the case this year," she said.

She said she thinks it was unlikely the demand for a GP was not there, especially given the ageing population.

"When the medical centre lost its fulltime GP - its five day a week service - the population was supposedly the same and the appointments were enough to keep one GP busy five days a week."

Freeth said the trust was "disappointed" the census had not been able to provide more definite figures.

The petition had gathered 458 signatures before it closed in March, and the trust now plan to deliver it to the district health board, Marlborough Primary Health and the local MP within the next six weeks.



*The Pelorus Area Health Trust - Roz Freeth, Hazel Booth, Trish Brown, Bev Foote and Jenny Garing - pictured last year, aim to deliver their petition in the coming six weeks.*

Springlands Health Clinic practice manager Mark McLean said Havelock generally had a GP for two days each week, but occasionally less.

"It's based on staff numbers rather than booking numbers," McLean said.

"One of the biggest problems is not that people don't want to deliver the service, but the resources and trying to get Gps to the area."



*The petition closed in March with 458 signatures.*

McLean said Springlands Health had open books, addressing one of the petition's demands.

PHO Chief Executive Beth Tester said Springlands would continue its service in Havelock, and there had been "positive murmurings" about increased services and [trials of virtual consultations](#).

"We have been talking to physios, podiatrists and other NGOs and mental health services to see if they could provide more services closer to home for the community in Havelock and the Sounds."