



NZMA questionnaire for political parties

Health vision

What is your party's vision for health? How do you see the future of healthcare and what specific objectives do you have for health in the short, medium and long-term?

Labour is committed to enhancing the well-being of all New Zealanders, so they can live longer, healthier lives. To do this we need to shift thinking away from seeing health policy in isolation, and from seeing healthcare as something that begins in a hospital or doctor's surgery, and ensure that all our policies enhance the well-being and health status of New Zealanders.

Good health is something that begins in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities. If a house is overcrowded, cold and damp, then it is hard to stay healthy. If parents lose their jobs they find it hard to put healthy food on the table or afford a visit to the doctor. If people do not have adequate income, then they find it hard to afford the basic necessities of life.

These are examples of what are sometimes called the social determinants of health. We must address the inequities that are contributing to poor health outcomes. This will require particular attention to policies in terms of education, income equality, housing, taxation and social development and how they impact on health.

A focus on addressing the social determinants of health and access to healthcare will not only improve health outcomes, but will also prove cost-effective and good for economic growth over time as the need for expensive interventions and treatments reduces. There is not a bottomless pit for expenditure, but investments now in proven early interventions should reduce the need for expenditure not only in the health system but in other areas of government including social development and corrections.

Medical workforce

For many years the medical workforce has been subject to major pressures which have serious implications for New Zealand's ability to delivery high quality safe services to New Zealanders now and in the future.

1. Does your party support the continuing work of Health Workforce New Zealand and will it ensure that the necessary resources are provided to implement its programmes?

Labour will continue to develop the role of Health Workforce New Zealand to provide a coordinated approach to ensuring New Zealand has a sustainable, flexible and appropriate health workforce.

Labour will ensure that the focus of Health Workforce New Zealand encompasses a wider health focus beyond the medical workforce to a whole-of-health-system approach that includes nursing and allied healthcare professionals.

2. Do you have a comprehensive plan to address medical workforce shortages and specifically how will you improve the retention of doctors in the workforce?

A strong and well-resourced health workforce is necessary for a strong public health system. New Zealanders are rightly concerned that we will train and recruit sufficient qualified staff to ensure that we maintain a high standard of care in our health system. There have been a large number of stories emerging that indicate many of our health professionals are being attracted overseas after being trained in New Zealand.

Labour is committed to developing career planning and monitoring schemes for health workforce streams, including supporting and expanding bonding and advanced fellowship schemes. Labour will also support further increase in the number of medical student places as resources allow.

3. How will your party commit to alleviate the burden of student debt for medical students?

Labour has a strong record on increasing student support and alleviating the debt burden on young graduates. In the fifth Labour Government we removed interest on student loans while studying, before later removing interest altogether. We also significantly widened access to student allowances by increasing the parental income threshold, increased the availability of scholarships, and capped fees through the fee maxima policy.

These policies have combined to increase the number of students receiving allowances by 30,000 in the last few years and have reduced the median time taken to repay student loans down to 5 years. Labour will keep interest free student loans for all borrowers who remain in New Zealand, and for those students continuing to study overseas, or who are working for New Zealand government agencies overseas. We will review the impact of National's changes to student loan scheme eligibility, and reverse or alter those changes if it is shown that they have had a negative impact on completing post-graduate courses or on the participation of those from under-represented groups such as Maori and Pacific students.

4. What is your party's policy on the seven-year loan cap which will potentially impact on 20-30 per cent of medical students?

The impact on students of the 7 EFTS lifetime limit will be investigated as part of Labour's review of student loan changes. If tertiary education participation is found to be negatively impacted by these changes, Labour will look to reinstate student loan eligibility as resources allow.

Health equity

The NZMA released its position statement on health equity in March this year, calling on the Government to take urgent action to address the social determinants of health, and alleviate health inequity in our vulnerable populations.

1. What policies does your party intend to implement to address the social determinants that impact on health inequities in our country?

Labour will adopt a whole-of-government approach to reduce and eliminate inequities in health, including through coordinated policy approaches covering issues such as fairer taxation, education, housing, employment, poverty eradication and income inequality.

Labour has already made commitments which include:

- *Creating a \$5,000 tax free zone.*
- *Taking GST off all fresh fruit and vegetables.*
- *Increasing the minimum wage from \$13 to \$15 an hour, raising earnings for the quarter of a million workers who currently earn less than \$15.*
- *Committed to increasing and upgrading Housing New Zealand's state housing stock. Labour also remains committed to the policy of income related rents for state house tenants.*

Labour will set a range of nationwide health targets for priority areas such as immunisation, oral health, elective services, cancer waiting list times, avoidable hospital admissions, diabetes and mental health, healthier lifestyles, smoking cessation and efficiency in services.

Labour will ensure that Health Impact Assessments are undertaken of core policy initiatives across government, with a particular focus on equity issues.

Labour will adopt a life-course approach to ensure that the causes of poor health outcomes are addressed, with a particular focus on ensuring children receive the best start in life.

Labour will address the inequities in health status experienced by Māori, Pasifika peoples, refugees, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

2. What will your party do to address the relatively low health status of New Zealand's children?

Labour will make child health a priority, and increase the proportion of health sector spending on services for children aged up to six years.

Labour will extend free access for under sixes to after-hours medical services, meaning 24 hour, 7 day a week free access for under six year olds.

Labour will also do everything we can to ensure children are free of or are receiving quality care for debilitating health conditions when they enter school at 5 years old, by providing adequate funding of outreach services to reach vulnerable children, supporting and enhancing B4 School Checks and providing a "mop-up" service at school to capture those children who start school who have not accessed a B4 School Check.

Labour will require District Health Boards to adopt child health implementation plans with nationally agreed measurable outcomes and targets that are monitored by the Ministry of Health.

Labour will develop systems during pregnancy to identify children who are vulnerable, and then ensure that the relevant levels of support are in place to support and optimise parenting.

Labour will create a seamless transition from maternity services to health care services for infants and young children.

Labour will strengthen the Health in Schools Programme, including social workers, starting with low decile schools, with the aim of expanding the programme to higher decile schools as resources allow.

Health structures

The structure of the health system, with its 20 largely autonomous District Health Boards, continues to be overly complex, resulting in fragmentation of services and care available to New Zealanders.

1. Will your party commit to greater rationalisation of DHBs and if so, what approach will you take?

We have an open mind as to the question of the number of DHBs, and while we have no policy to change the number, if elected we will continue to monitor governance arrangements in the sector to ensure they are delivering the accountable, effective and efficient services that New Zealanders deserve.

District Health Boards should provide an important channel for community input into decision making. At the moment there is a limited transparency in the way that many District Health Boards operate.

Labour will require District Health Boards to adopt more democratic and transparent processes, including greater inclusion of the public and community in the decision making process and a requirement that the budget development process be undertaken in public session.

2. Will your party commit to greater regional/national coordination of services? How?

Labour supports more shared service delivery between DHBs, easier and more flexible inter-district flows and a more open and accountable approach to the setting of priorities and budgets for DHBs.

3. In a situation of scarce health resources, what is your party's position on the interface of the public and private sectors in health?

Labour has a passionate belief in universal access to quality health care, while meeting the needs of vulnerable populations. We believe where possible healthcare should be provided by the public sector however there will always be a need to work with the private sector.

4. How does your party view the role of the private health sector in New Zealand's wider health system?

The private health sector has an important part to play in New Zealand's wider health system. For example, there is a growing role for the private sector in the delivery of primary healthcare, aged care and other health services.

Primary Health Care Strategy

The current Primary Health Care Strategy has been in place for many years and its overall objectives are widely supported in the health sector.

1. Will your party commit to a comprehensive review of the PHCS and nationally consistent arrangements for the delivery of services?

Labour is proud of the Primary Healthcare strategy that we put in place in the first decade of this century. It made significant progress in ensuring that receiving primary healthcare is more

affordable and accessible. Changes by the current government have seen a reduction in the number of Primary Healthcare Organisations, and a growing role for the private sector in the delivery of primary healthcare.

Labour will re-invigorate the primary healthcare strategy to ensure all New Zealanders have access to affordable primary healthcare, including after-hours care.

Labour will review the funding formula for primary healthcare to ensure affordable access for all New Zealanders and that the needs of vulnerable populations are being met, including a review of rural health funding to ensure access to affordable and quality services.

2. General Practice continues as the core of the Primary Health Care Strategy. How will your party fully engage with General Practice and its national representatives to further evolve the strategy?

Labour will encourage the development of further genuine collaboration in the delivery of primary healthcare, refining the PHO model and drawing together GP services and other allied health professionals.

Labour will facilitate clear communication between primary and secondary care providers to prevent unnecessary admissions and hospitalisations.

Labour will develop multi-disciplinary primary health teams that work in the community (including in schools) with families, including through home based visits to ensure access to primary healthcare services for individuals and families who are not currently accessing services.

Labour will further investigate the DHB salaried General Practitioner option as a way of ensuring accessible and better integrated primary care, where GP services are not being provided or are not sufficient to meet the needs of the community.

3. The provisions of 24/7 services continues to be a critical issue for primary care, particularly in rural areas. What will your party do to address this issue in a comprehensive way? Do you intend to have a national strategy?

We have seen a number of reports in recent times that the cost of accessing primary healthcare is meaning that some children are not getting the treatment that they need. This is particularly so in terms of access to affordable after-hours care.

Labour will extend free access for under sixes to after-hours medical services, meaning 24 hour, 7 day a week free access for under six year olds.

Labour will re-invigorate the primary healthcare strategy to ensure all New Zealanders have access to affordable primary healthcare, including after-hours care.

Health services

National consistency

1. Will your party ensure equitable access to health services for all New Zealanders by the development of appropriate national policy frameworks within which services are delivered?

Labour is committed to ensuring all New Zealanders have the opportunity to live a healthy life. We will continue to focus on ensuring universal, equitable access to health services while continuing to provide special attention and resources for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Clinical research

1. From an NZMA perspective, it is very important for a doctor to have the ability to conduct and participate in research. Does your party believe that DHBs should be directed to facilitate and support clinical research as a core activity? What initiatives will your party put in place to increase clinical research in New Zealand?

Labour supports long-term research to deal with the underlying causes of illness and strategies for the promotion of good health and well-being. We support a doctor's ability to conduct and participate in medical research.

We will maintain current levels for funding for health research and build upon this as resources permit. The R & D Tax Credit is also likely to provide some encouragement for private-sector health research.

Maternity

1. What will your party do to improve maternity services for the consumer (not the providers)?

Increasingly, women are transferred home on average within two days of delivery or take early discharge from birthing facilities with Lead Maternity Carer support. Services need to be accessible, coordinated and integrated into the family care services support environment. In some areas Family Health Units should be available when women need respite care or Lactation Consultant intervention to maintain breastfeeding. Labour will ensure community based facilities are developed by the District Health Boards in conjunction with Midwives, GPs, Plunket, La Leche League and Social Workers.

2. What will your party do to improve the provision of maternity services (by providers)?

The implementation of the Maternity Action Plan over the last two years has focussed on workforce development, quality assurance and maternity new-born information system development. We support those initiatives as they were identified as being a high priority in 2008. We will review the implementation of the 8 principals and 11 goals of the Maternity Action Plan developed by Labour in 2008.

3. What steps will your party take to ensure that primary maternity care is brought within the PHO environment?

Labour will continue further alignment of Maternity Service provision with primary health services and Primary Health Organisations.

Elective services

1. What steps will your party take to reduce waiting times for many elective procedures?

Research undertaken by the Auditor-General shows that access to surgery is often a product of where you live rather than your needs. So-called "post code" access to elective services is not acceptable for New Zealanders. National guidelines regarding prioritisation, waiting times and condition treatment pathways will result in consistency and clarity in the delivery of elective services.

Labour will support the development of strong regional and/or national networks to make the most efficient use of health resources. Support the development of national services, where appropriate, to deliver specialised care and encourage innovative practice.

Labour will review the capital charging regime as it applies to public hospitals.

Labour will ensure a coordinated hospital and specialist care system with consistent access criteria, quality and timeliness across New Zealand.

Labour will develop nationwide tools for elective surgery prioritisation based around timeliness, equity and quality.

Pharmaceuticals

1. Pharmac has to balance cost with clinical efficacy when making decisions about funding medicines. Has it got that balance right, and would your party change it?

Labour believes that the PHARMAC model has delivered to New Zealanders low cost medicines and have saved the country hundreds of millions of dollars overall through its negotiations with drug companies. While individual decisions of PHARMAC may cause concerns to groups of people, the overall model must be protected.

Labour will protect and enhance PHARMAC's role, including through making protection of PHARMAC a bottom line that will not be traded away in trade negotiations.

Labour will not intervene in PHARMAC's decisions but will review the criteria for funding highly specialised medicines to ensure that those with rare diseases are treated equitably and fairly in decisions about the availability of drugs.

2. Is your party committed to providing additional funding to allow Pharmac to extend the range of medicines it purchases?

Labour has no plans to provide additional funding to allow Pharmac to extend the range of medicines it purchases, however we may review this in the future as resources permit.

Statutory payments

Payments for some medical services are set by legislation or regulations, and have not been increased for many years. This means services provided under these arrangements are now seriously undervalued.

1. Will your party review all relevant legislation and regulations with a view to changing this inflexible process?

Labour will review the funding formula for primary healthcare to ensure affordable access for all New Zealanders and that the needs of vulnerable populations are being met, including a review of rural health funding to ensure access to affordable and quality services.

Labour will review the capital charging regime as it applies to public hospitals.

2. Is your party prepared to introduce compulsory insurance or provide tax relief?

Labour has no plans to introduce compulsory insurance or provide tax relief.

Private health insurance

The costs of private health insurance are increasing rapidly for many New Zealanders.

1. Is your party prepared to subsidise premiums and/or introduce a community rating system?

Labour has no plans to change the current arrangements regarding health insurance.

2. Is your party planning to provide tax relief on premiums?

No changes are planned.