

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?

National will continue to make health a top spending priority. Despite the worst economic conditions in 80 years, we have put an extra average \$500 million each year into our public health service.

During the most difficult financial times in generations, we've worked hard to fix our hospitals and speed up access to vital services like Emergency Departments, elective surgery and cancer treatment. We've worked to improve maternity services, and immunised record numbers of kids.

Our investment has helped deliver an extra 800 extra doctors and 2000 extra nurses, all cancer patients ready for radiation treatment are receiving it within four weeks, 91% of all two year olds are immunised and now, we're delivering an extra 27,000 elective surgeries a year.

National will continue to strengthen the health workforce, provide even faster access to elective surgery, shorter waits in Emergency Department, faster cancer treatment and ensure even more children are immunised.

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?**

Yes

- 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?**

Yes.

There are now 800 extra doctors and 2000 extra nurses working in our District Health Boards compared to 2008.

We have introduced the very successful Voluntary Bonding scheme, with around 1800 medical graduates enrolled.

National's significant tax cuts have put more money back into households across the country, and initiatives like the Rural Immersion Scheme and will help keep health professionals in our rural communities.

Health Workforce New Zealand will continue to work with the health sector to address shortages and plan for the future.

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

We are committed to retaining interest-free student loans for borrowers in New Zealand, to ensure broad access to tertiary education. This policy provides a very high level of subsidy for tertiary education; the Government writes off 45 cents for every dollar lent through the scheme.

This is in addition to tuition subsidies paid to tertiary education providers, which are on average 75% of the cost of tuition fees. Students pay on average 25%.

The Student Allowance Scheme is provided for those students who would not otherwise be able to study. These initiatives taken together mean that New Zealand has one of, if not the most, generous student support systems in the world.

If students make a voluntary payment of \$500 or more we'll match it with a 10% bonus.

The Voluntary Bonding Scheme makes payments against a medical student's loan for every year they spend working in a hard to staff region or speciality. The scheme offers \$10,000 per year to medical graduates against their student loan for up to five years.

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?

I understand the NZMSA has been working with officials regarding situations where students could be affected by the cap.

National is looking at the situation and will work to ensure people aren't unfairly disadvantaged.

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?

Three of our six health targets are focused on health prevention and health promotion.

Reducing smoking, lifting immunisation rates and ensuring better checks for cardiovascular and diabetes will help improve the health of hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders.

We're rolling out the \$12 million Rheumatic Fever scheme to help reduce this third world disease in our most vulnerable communities. This will benefit around 22,000 children and reduce long-term health effects like heart problems.

Keeping people healthier goes beyond the health service. Almost 130,000 homes have been retrofitted with heating and insulation since 2008. And Whanau Ora is bringing important social services together to help provide better and more tailored support for our communities.

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

We recently announced that free visits to the doctor for children aged under-six will be extended to after-hours. This will slow the numbers of young children presenting to our busy hospital emergency departments with illnesses their GP clinic could have treated.

We have increased funding for primary care by \$100 million since 2008, and made other improvements in child health, including improved immunisation rates, better help for mothers and babies in hospitals, restoring Plunketline, more Plunket visits for first time Mums, and a strong move against rheumatic fever.

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 will continue to cross-appoint board members to DHBs and encourage regionalisation of services; however we have no plans to integrate DHBs.

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

We are already working to provide greater regional and national coordination of services.

DHB's are working together on regional plans to share services; clinical leaders are driving improvement in areas like emergency departments and cardiac services. And DHBs are moving towards shared IT systems to improve services for the patient and efficiencies in our hospitals.

Health Benefits Ltd has also been established to improve procurement.

We will work to ensure even greater regionalisation over the next three years.

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?

National believes our public and private health sectors can work together to provide even better health services for patients.

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

The private sector has an important role to play in supporting our public health service, but not at their expense.

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?

We have no plans to change the current system

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?

National will continue to bring healthcare closer to home.

This includes increasing the number of direct referrals from GPs for diagnostic tests, engaging GPs to perform more minor surgeries closer to home and encouraging development of Integrated Family Health Centres.

We will continue to work with GPs to strengthen primary healthcare.

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?

National will work with the sector to ensure there is access to after-hours medical care.

We are currently trialling a scheme in Kapiti, Rangiora and Levin where ambulance services provide urgent care at home. We look at the success of these pilots with a view to rolling them in other communities.

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?

National wants to improve the health outcomes of all New Zealanders and has no plans to change the way services are delivered, other to build on our successes and improvements.

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?

The Government is committed to improving New Zealand's clinical trials environment, and has accepted many of the Health Committee's recommendations on how that should be achieved.

Over the next ten months, the ethics committee approval process will be streamlined and simplified with;

- more comprehensive procedural rules

- internationally-competitive decision making timelines for ethics committees
- shorter, simpler application forms and;
- an easier application system online

We are also encouraging senior doctors to undertake more research.

Maternity

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

National has made significant improvements to the quality and safety of maternity services.

We all want the best systems in place to protect the safety of mothers and babies.

Safer maternity services are a priority for the Government – that's why we put an extra \$103m over four years into improving maternity services in our first Budget, and we announced \$54 million in this year's Budget.

The Government's Maternity Quality Initiative is a major piece of work involving collaboration and strong support between the maternity sector (DHBs and clinicians, mothers and their families and colleges) and the Ministry of Health to improve safety and quality.

This year, we have launched four key areas for improvement;

- a safety and quality programme that will allow us to more closely monitor the standard of care and the impacts on mothers and babies.
- new clinical protocols for routine and emergency transfers of mothers between midwives and obstetricians and other specialists
- nationally standardised maternity notes available electronically, and
- \$2 million for improving the comprehensive collection of maternity data and improved monitoring of maternity services

And, from 28 March 2012 all midwives joining the voluntary bonding scheme will be required to complete the Midwifery First Year of Practice programme.

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

See above.

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

National has already made substantial improvements to our maternity services.

Elective services

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

An extra 27,000 people are now receiving elective surgery every year. We will work to further increase this number – our policy will be announced in due course.

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?

National is supportive of Pharmac's work and has no plans to change the way they fund medicines.

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

National has put an extra \$180 million into medicines since 2008. This has resulted New Zealanders receiving an extra 4.2 million prescriptions, and better access to medicines for around an extra 180,000 people each year.

Pharmac has funded 59 new drugs and widened access to another 68 since 2008. Before our investment some patients had to pay the full cost price, or go without important medicines.

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?

National has no current plans in this area.

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

National has no plans in this area.

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?**

National has no plans in this area.

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

National has no plans in this area.

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