

25 October 2011

Lesley Clark  
CEO  
New Zealand Medical Association  
P O Box 156  
WELLINGTON 6140

Dear Lesley

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your Association's Election questionnaire regarding UnitedFuture's health-related policy for the 2011 General Election. You have asked the following questions:

***1. 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?***

UnitedFuture believes that maintaining wellness, is fundamental to quality of life of all individuals and families and the maintenance of a strong economy. Policy therefore should be as focused on prevention as much as cure. UnitedFuture encourages healthy lifestyle choices and believes access to treatment should happen in a timely manner and include access to all health facilities and services across New Zealand.

***2. 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. UnitedFuture will direct the Ministry of Health to implement a national workforce development strategy to address both current and future long-term workforce shortages understanding that this may mean drastic changes like a doubling in the number of doctors trained.

***3. 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. UnitedFuture will provide first class working conditions for health professionals as the key to recruitment and development, through the accreditation of workplaces such as the American "magnet" hospital status. We will also introduce a sabbatical scheme that would allow health professionals to take a year out of work every five years to update their skills and knowledge, as well as embark on a pro-active overseas recruitment campaign, and develop the concept of bonded "working holidays" for health professionals. To encourage new medical graduates to remain in New Zealand we will establish bonding schemes for graduates in

fields facing workforce shortages (e.g. child psychologists, pathologists, radiologists, radiographers, general practitioners, psychiatrists) into a period of service in New Zealand following graduation.

**4. How will your party commit to alleviate the burden of student debt for medical students and what is your party's policy on the seven-year loan cap which will potentially impact on 20-30 per cent of medical students?**

UnitedFuture will cut tuition fees for those studying medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and nursing. We propose a zero-fees policy for tertiary education in New Zealand in place of Student Allowances.

**5. What policies does your party intend to implement to address the social determinants that impact on health inequities in our country? What will your party do to address the relatively low health status of New Zealand's children?**

UnitedFuture not only places children and parents firmly at the centre of all our policy and planning – we exist as a Party to keep Government focused on the family. We will regularly update the child and youth health indicators and ensure a focus to improving these outcomes where a need is identified. We will:

- target infant health by concentrating on the appropriate support for parents before and after birth and ensuring high-quality extended care and support, including home visits, by lead maternity carers and Plunket.
- Treat child obesity as a parenting issue and use parent education as the first line of attack to reduce obesity rates.
- Supplement the work of social workers in schools with health clinics where appropriate.
- Improve dental services to Primary and Secondary school age children by increasing the number of dental therapists trained; ensure DHBs secure sufficient contracts with local dentists for the provision of services to secondary students and additional services to Primary age students; and expand the use of mobile dental clinics.
- Ensure that information about immunisation is widely circulated, including the latest international developments, to promote informed decisions by parents.
- Focus on increasing affordable housing for families with children.

**6. Will your party commit to greater rationalisation of DHBs and if so, what approach will you take? Will your party commit to greater regional/national coordination of services? How?**

UnitedFuture will retain the current basic structure of the health system, to provide stability for health professionals and consumers and to give it an opportunity to deliver. Where communities agree that it is in their best interests to merge DHBs, as in the case of Otago and Southland, UnitedFuture will encourage such amalgamations. Moreover we will require greater collaboration between DHBs to reduce management and operational costs particularly in the supply of goods and services, with the view to amalgamating some boards in the future if efficiency goals are not achieved.

**7. In a situation of scarce health resources, what is your party's position on the interface of the public and private sectors in health? How does your party view the role of the private health sector in New Zealand's wider health system?**

The current public health system is failing to keep up with the demands being placed on it and will continue to do so unless demand is substantially reduced. At the same time there is underutilised capacity in the private surgical sector. Both public and private sectors are crucial to delivering the high quality and timely healthcare New Zealanders deserve and expect. Where public services are unable to cope with patient demand, such as elective surgical procedures, we will ensure DHB's contract out work to Private Hospitals to reduce waiting lists for such surgery for those who are likely to wait longer than 6 months for their operations.

**8. Will your party commit to a comprehensive review of the Primary Health Care Strategy and nationally consistent arrangements for the delivery of services?**

Yes.

**9. 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?**

UnitedFuture has already collaborated closely with General Practice in the development of the National Medicines Strategy, *Medicines New Zealand*. We would apply that same approach in evolving further the PHCS with this group and as with the development of *Medicines New Zealand*, listen with an open mind to their concerns and recommendations.

**10. 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?**

Again, as mentioned above, we will engage and consult with General Practice and those effected communities and take the lead from them as to whether a specific National Strategy is required to address this issue.

**11. 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?**

Yes.

**12. 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?**

In principle, yes. UnitedFuture will boost funding for Crown Research Institutes to conduct research into health related fields.

**13. What will your party do to improve maternity services for the consumer (not the providers)? What will your party do to improve the provision of maternity services (by providers)? What steps will your party take to ensure that primary maternity care is brought within the PHO environment?**

UnitedFuture has no specific policies in this area at present, but it would be open to discussion with the maternity service professionals and providers to develop an appropriate level of care in maternity services.

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

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**15. 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?**

In general, yes. However, when UnitedFuture's National Medicines Strategy, *Medicines New Zealand*, is fully implemented there will be far greater transparency with regard to PHARMAC's decision making around drug purchasing.

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

Where appropriate, yes. Greater funding will also be required to implement UnitedFuture's intention to expand the role of PHARMAC in the prioritisation and procurement of hospital medicines and vaccines as part of the National Medicines Strategy, *Medicines New Zealand*.

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

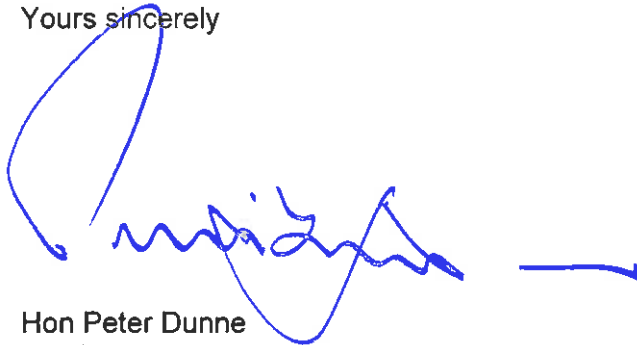
If that is considered necessary, yes.

**18. Is your party prepared to introduce compulsory insurance or provide tax relief? Is your party prepared to subsidise premiums and/or introduce a community rating system? Is your party planning to provide tax relief on premiums?**

UnitedFuture will introduce tax concessions to recognise the savings created by those who choose to take out private health insurance, or pay for private treatment, prioritising those aged over 65. Investigate the feasibility of a national health insurance scheme for non-trauma based disability, in particular elective surgery for the elderly.

I trust this provides the information you require.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter Dunne', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Hon Peter Dunne  
Leader  
UnitedFuture