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**More investment in public health needed**

New Zealand public health doctors are calling for increased and sustained investment in effective public health.

Not only will such funding improve the health and wellbeing of the New Zealand population, but it will also support the country's economic growth, says the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine.

Spending on Vote: Health in New Zealand is substantial, and the College says that cost demands are likely to increase substantially in the coming years, due to a number of long-term challenges such as the growing burden of chronic severe health conditions, climate change-related health issues, antimicrobial resistance, inequity of health outcomes, and the need for strong primary health care.

The College points out that preventable disease and injury currently make up about 30% of all health losses (measured as disability-adjusted life years) in the country. Māori in particular experience excessive preventable health losses.

Evidence shows that public health interventions, which focus on prevention rather than cure, are cost-effective and the College says that this spending should be viewed as an investment, and not as a budgetary cost. The College says that this is an important principle, which should underlie current planning for the Review of the New Zealand Health and Disability System.

"An investment approach to public health takes the long view," says the College president, Dr Felicity Dumble. "This should be taken into account in the System Review."

"Investment in public health protects people from disease, promotes health and wellbeing, and prevents people from getting sick.

"This in turn is associated with increased labour supply and productivity, which contribute to the country's economic growth."

"However, many of the factors influencing health, what we call the 'social determinants of health', lie outside the health sector. So, a partnership approach across government sectors is required," says Dr Dumble. "In addition, future health and longevity should be explicitly and fully valued in any modelling required for example by the Treasury, as a failure to do so devalues any gains made."

The College has just released its [Public Health as an Investment Policy Statement](#), available on the College's website.

Dr Dumble says the College is also calling for health impact assessments across government policies; public health representation at all levels of government; full valuation of long-term outcomes that is consistent across government sectors; and stops to any commercial conflicts of interest in health policy.

"Political commitment and leadership, strong governance, and an intersectoral, whole-of-government approach is what is needed, along with increased investment in public health."

**ENDS**

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## Further background

### *About the NZCPHM*

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine is the professional body representing the medical specialty of public health medicine in New Zealand. It has 222 members, all of whom are medical doctors, including 185 fully qualified Public Health Medicine Specialists, with most others being registrars completing advanced training in the specialty of public health medicine.

Public Health Medicine is the branch of medicine concerned with the assessment of population health and health care needs, the development of policy and strategy, health promotion, the control and prevention of disease, and the organisation of services. The College strives to achieve health gain and equity for our population, reducing inequalities across socioeconomic and cultural groups, and promoting environments in which everyone can be healthy.

### *About public health as an investment*

The College has just released its Public Health as an Investment Policy Statement, available on the College's Policy Statements webpage at <https://www.nzcpm.org.nz/policy-publications>.

Additionally, the College has endorsed the New Zealand Medical Association's position statement on health as an investment, at [https://www.nzma.org.nz/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/77277/Health-as-an-investment\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.nzma.org.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/77277/Health-as-an-investment_FINAL.pdf)

### *From the College's Public Health as an Investment Policy Statement*

([https://www.nzcpm.org.nz/media/126101/2019\\_02\\_20\\_ph\\_as\\_an\\_investment\\_policy\\_statement.pdf](https://www.nzcpm.org.nz/media/126101/2019_02_20_ph_as_an_investment_policy_statement.pdf)):

“The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM) calls for increased and sustained investment in effective public health policy and programmes, to improve the health and wellbeing of the New Zealand population. This process involves the whole of society and the whole of government and requires a human rights and people-centred approach that partners to achieve health equity.

The NZCPHM calls for, among other things:

1. investment in policies, programmes and services that improve population health and achieve health equity;
2. investment in public health infrastructure;
3. investment in political capital to implement policies that improve public health, including the World Health Organization (WHO)'s 'Best Buys';
4. health impact assessments (HIAs) across the policies of government entities and ministries;
5. partnerships that address the societal determinants of health, through
  - a. political commitment and leadership expressed through government policies,
  - b. strong governance, and
  - c. an intersectoral, whole-of-government approach to social investment,

with for example,

public health representation at all levels of government;  
full valuation of long-term outcomes consistently across government sectors;  
strong governance to manage commercial conflicts of interest in policy development.”

Public sector investment in long-term outcomes that is full and consistent includes:

- The balancing of cost-effectiveness with need, equity, affordability, and sustainability.
- Cost-effectiveness analyses that adequately assess longer term benefits against upfront costs. This includes the discounting of non-budgetary benefits and costs over time — ie. balancing the relative value of benefits and costs in future — with discount rates that better incorporate time preference, risk and intergenerational impacts. The higher discount rates currently set by the Treasury devalue future life losses from premature death and later suffering/disability, and thus reduce the gains from preventing these now.
- Using the same value of life calculation in effect across all government sectors, when determining funding.

More details and sources, on how public sector investment should value long-term outcomes fully and consistently across government sectors, are available on page 8 of the NZCPHM’s [Public Health as an Investment Policy Statement](#).