



NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEDICINE

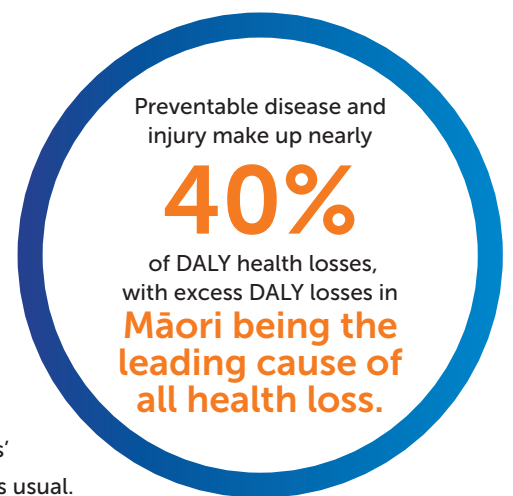
THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN PUBLIC HEALTH

THE PROBLEM

Health systems around the world and in New Zealand are facing many challenges, including health inequity and poverty, the 'longevity boom' with ageing populations, the growing burden from long-term health conditions, emerging infectious diseases including antimicrobial resistance, climate change, and the increasing cost of new medical technologies.



Approximately **1.1 million** disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) are lost in New Zealand each year from people dying prematurely or suffering or living with a disease or disability. This is equivalent to every adult and child losing **3 months** of their 12-month year from early death, ill-health or injury.



The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicts that nations' **healthcare costs will double by 2050** if we continue with business as usual.

A SOLUTION THAT'S GOOD FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Curative services alone will not address these issues. A proactive preventative approach is needed.



Investing in public health is a **key solution.**



15%

GENETICS



15%

ENVIRONMENTAL



25%

HEALTH CARE



50%

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Canadian Institute of Advanced Research (2012)

Advancements in public health in the last 100 years have historically been the biggest driver of improved health for people. Initiatives such as vaccination, control of infectious diseases, and the recognition of tobacco use as a health hazard, have led to improvements in health and wellbeing, and a substantial increase in life expectancy.

Studies of the factors influencing health and wellbeing in a population show that it is the wider socio-economic environment that has the largest impact. To have the maximal impact on improving people's health and wellbeing, there needs to be increased investment in these wider determinants of health, such as housing, income, education and employment.

Addressing the wider determinants of health would significantly improve the health of populations overall, and would also reduce health inequities between population groups.

Investing in public health means an intentional allocation and use of society's resources to produce prolonged improvements in the health and wellbeing of whole populations and reduce health inequities.

Other interventions that could potentially generate large health gains while being cost-effective include dietary salt reduction and transitioning to plant-based diets. These interventions would have large co-benefits in terms of planetary health and sustainability.

In short, increased investment in public health will provide the foundation for a healthy and productive society.

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A SOLUTION THAT'S GOOD FOR US FISCALLY

Investing in public health is also fiscally prudent: A 2017 systematic review of public health interventions in high-income countries with universal healthcare (including NZ) found that local and national public health interventions had a median **return on investment of 14:1** for health spending.



Increased labour supply and productivity



Economic **growth**



Helping to control the demand for other health services thus **reducing the burden** on the health system

Given this, it is important Governments view and consider public health spending as a **high-value investment**, rather than a budgetary cost.

But ...

The reality is different – for example, dollar investment in prevention for diseases attributable to tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food is currently less than 0.5% of Vote: Health, yet these unhealthy commodities contribute to an estimated one third of health loss.



CHANGE THE FOCUS

It's not just a Vote: Health issue. Investing in public health means taking a Whole of Government and a Whole of Society approach across a range of public policy, programmes and regulation. This is consistent with this Government's focus on intergenerational wellbeing and the Living Standards Framework and it aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It would also align with and contribute towards the fulfilment of the New Zealand Health Strategy of keeping people healthy - living well, staying well, getting well.

We need increased investment in **cost-effective core public health** services to achieve social and economic benefits. This investment must allow for targeted, evidenced-based and cost-effective interventions that address health issues with high need/disease burden and large inequities.

We need to invest in **development of the public health workforce**, and in improved collaboration between public health practitioners and the wider health system.

We also need investment in **health impact assessments** (HIAs) as part of an overall 'health in all policies' approach across all Government policies, to achieve better policy coherence across non-health sectors.

And we need to ensure that those whose commercial or other interests conflict with the health of populations are not driving the health agenda.

Further information and detail is in the NZCPHM's **Public Health as an Investment Policy Statement (2019)**, available at www.nzcphm.org.nz/policy-publications.



WHO ARE WE?

The NZCPHM represents the medical speciality of public health medicine in New Zealand.

Public health medicine is defined as the branch of medicine concerned with the epidemiological analysis of the health and health care of populations and population groups. It involves 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.

Public health is focussed on achieving health equity across ethnic, socioeconomic, age, and cultural groups, and promoting environments in which everyone can be healthy.

For further information and references, see our Public Health as an Investment Policy document, as well as the other policies available on our website www.nzcphm.org.nz