



14 March 2021

**Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee:  
Budget Policy Statement**

The [New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine](#) would like to thank the Finance and Expenditure Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on the 2021 Budget Policy Statement.<sup>1</sup>

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (the College) is the professional body representing the medical specialty of public health medicine in New Zealand. We have 205 active members, including 185 fully qualified Specialists, with the majority of the remainder being advanced trainees in the medical 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 NZCPHM partners to achieve health gain and equity for our population, eliminating inequities across socioeconomic and ethnic groups, and promoting environments in which everyone can be healthy.

**COVID-19 response**

The College acknowledges the decisive action that the Government has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year and on its adoption of the 'elimination strategy' to keep New Zealand safe.<sup>2</sup> We are proud also of the collective efforts of our communities in the response. We appreciate the immense impact that this pandemic has had on all aspects of the economy, as well as on people's lives.

We support the three overarching policy goals that the Government has adopted for the next three years:

- Continuing to keep New Zealand safe from COVID-19
- Accelerating the recovery and rebuild from the impacts of COVID-19
- Laying the foundations for the future, including addressing key issues such as our climate change response, housing affordability and child poverty.<sup>1</sup>

In our submissions on the Budget Priorities 2019 and 2020, the College indicated support for the wellbeing approach to the Budget that has now been adopted under the Public Finance Act.<sup>3,4,5</sup> We have further supported the wellbeing objectives that have been adopted under this framework.<sup>3,4</sup> Some of the areas identified by the Treasury as wellbeing objectives are amongst the ten areas identified by our College as health priorities for the country.<sup>6</sup>

We understand the need for, and are supportive of, the inclusion of the additional dimensions of 'keeping COVID-19 out of our communities', 'combatting the impacts of COVID-19' and 'building back from COVID-19' into these objectives for 2021.<sup>1</sup> We add our voice to those who are calling for 'building back better', including actions to address the climate emergency and a focus on ensuring a fairer, more equitable and more resilient society.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

## **Beyond recovery**

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 exposed weaknesses in New Zealand's public health defences, resulting from years of under-funding.<sup>10</sup> Some of these gaps were highlighted in the Rapid Audit of Contact Tracing study undertaken in early 2020.<sup>11</sup> Reports on other major public health events over the past few years, such as the Havelock North campylobacter outbreak in 2016 and the measles outbreak in 2019 have similarly highlighted these gaps.<sup>12,13</sup>

The Government acted quickly during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to invest additional funding to strengthen New Zealand health services, including an allocation of additional funding to improve contract tracing systems and to increase capacity at Public Health Units to deal with the pandemic. This additional funding has been much appreciated.

However, the College wishes to note that investment into public health infrastructure and workforce capacity needs to be long-term and sustained to enable us to respond to similar threats in the future. Investment is needed to develop and maintain the structures, systems and workforce that will prepare us to deal with future threats and also to deal with less visible but equally impactful, factors affecting population health, such as those identified in our [Prescription for Health and Equity for All](#).<sup>6</sup>

We note that public health services have been allocated around 2.3% of the Vote Health budget for many years, decreased from 3.9% in 2010 / 2011. In keeping with the Government policy goal of 'Laying the foundations for the future', we request that consideration be given to additional funding to this area in Budget 2021, and beyond.

We wish to point out that spending on health generally, and public health in particular, should be seen as an investment:<sup>14</sup>

evidence indicates that public health interventions are cost-effective (with some being cost-saving for healthcare systems and even revenue-raising for government) and contribute to improvements in health outcomes in the short, medium, and long term.<sup>15,16,17,18,19</sup> A systematic review from 2017 assessed return on investment of public health interventions in high-income countries with universal healthcare (including New Zealand).<sup>16</sup> This review indicated that local and national public health interventions contribute to long-term health gain, with a median return on investment of 14:1 for health spending.<sup>16</sup> Considering these benefits, it is important that governments view and consider public health spending as a high-value investment, rather than a budgetary cost.<sup>20,21</sup>

Investment in this area will not only ensure that we are better prepared to deal with further pandemics and public health emergencies, but will lead to a happier, healthier New Zealand, with a lower long term health burden for society.

Thank you for the opportunity for the NZCPHM to submit on the Budget Policy Statement 2021. We hope our feedback is helpful and are happy to provide further clarification on matters covered in this submission.

Sincerely,



Dr Jim Miller, President, NZCPHM

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  - <sup>3</sup> New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee: Budget Policy Statement 2020. Wellington: NZCPHM, 2019  
[https://www.nzcphm.org.nz/media/125704/nzcphm\\_submission\\_budget\\_policy\\_statement\\_2019.pdf](https://www.nzcphm.org.nz/media/125704/nzcphm_submission_budget_policy_statement_2019.pdf)
  - <sup>4</sup> New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee: Budget Policy Statement 2020. Wellington: NZCPHM, 2020  
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