



HEALTH POLICY



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Core Health Values:

1. Prevention is better than cure. United**Future** encourages healthy lifestyle choices.
2. Access to treatment should happen in a timely manner and include access to all health facilities and services across New Zealand.
3. On public health and safety matters relating to individuals, United**Future** believes the following hierarchy of choices apply:
 - 1st Rely solely on personal responsibility
 - 2nd Educate through voluntary codes
 - 3rd Regulate

Vision

United**Future** 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.

Key issues

1. 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.
2. The cost of health care continues to rise at a rate of about twice that of inflation. NZ has an ageing population increasing the demands on the health system and the decreasing ratio of tax payers.
3. Particular ethnic groups have major health issues affecting their quality of life and lifespans.
4. Our medical workforce is not planned for in a sustainable manner.
5. New Zealand has obesity and diabetic epidemics, the full force of which is yet to hit home. 30% of deaths are diet related. 6% die from lack of fruit and vegetables – 3 times the road toll.
6. Alcohol, Tobacco and drug abuse are significant contributors to poor health outcomes in NZ and we have high incidence of sexually transmitted infections
7. We pay for PRIMARY health care but subsidise, or make SECONDARY care free- the only OECD nation to do so.
8. The high cost of sickness is felt at every level, personally, in families, in lost productivity, in communities and in tax-take.

Policies for a healthy society will address all of these issues.

EXPAND THE PREVENTION WORK OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICE

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Expand the development of strategies to reduce non communicable diseases.
- Assign an Associate Minister of Health:
 - to monitor the efficacy of prevention services and campaigns; and
 - to identify factors present within such services and campaigns that most enhance their efficacy.
- Establish a CAM (Complementary & Alternative Medicines) Unit within the Ministry of Health to monitor the regulation and development of CAM products and practitioners, and facilitate integration of CAM and conventional medicines and practice where appropriate, as recommended by the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary & Alternative Medicines.
- Establish a national register for Type 1 Diabetes.
- Establish a Diabetes Research fund.
- Increase funding for Type 2 Diabetes testing.

ENHANCE PREVENTION SERVICES

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Give every New Zealander the chance to get a free standard "Warrant of Fitness" health check-up once a year.
- Reassess the efficacy of the national vision and hearing screening programme in schools, and expand access to optometrist tests for children with learning difficulties during primary school years.
- 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.
- Support effectively targeted cervical, breast, and skin cancer screening programmes, and establish a new prostate cancer screening programme for men.
- Increase funding for sexual health/contraceptive programmes targeted towards women aged 20-24, Asian and Pacific Islanders, in light of higher abortion rates for these populations.
- Support a regional approach to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Pacific, noting with concern that many of our Pacific neighbours have alarming increases in infection rates.
- Treat child obesity as a parenting issue and use parent education as the first line of attack to reduce obesity rates.
- Broaden community services card coverage to include subsidies for basic dental check-ups and basic procedures.
- Ensure that every community has good after-hours services separate from Emergency Departments in hospitals.

STRENGTHEN LEGISLATION WHERE IT CAN BE SHOWN TO PREVENT ILLNESS - REGULATION WHERE NECESSARY

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Support schools to reduce the availability of high fat/sugar food to students.
- Support the use of "green prescriptions" through the development of safe and convenient venues for physical activity, such as walking paths and bicycle lanes.
- Establish minimum standards of cleanliness for waterways.
- Boost funding for Crown Research Institutes to conduct research into the health, wellbeing and productivity of New Zealand soils, and to develop new techniques for remedying any deterioration that has occurred over time.
- Establish targets for soil quality in which crops are grown. Our health depends entirely on the quality of the food we ingest which in turn depends on the quality of the soils in which it was grown. If the soils lack essential nutrients then so do we.
- Adopt a national strategy, including private sector funding, to insulate all New Zealand homes to at least 1977 standards. This also has benefits related to climate change and family finance.
- Work to reduce particulates from car emissions.
- Encourage food outlets to identify if insect spray has been used on the produce.
- Oppose the decriminalisation of cannabis.

ENCOURAGE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING GOOD HEALTH - EDUCATION WHERE POSSIBLE

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Improve public education regarding the safe and effective use of quality prescription medicines, as part of Medicines New Zealand, the National Medicines Strategy.
- Support public education campaigns that emphasise the importance of nutrition and exercise and the consequences of poor nutrition such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and premature ageing.
- Support public education campaigns that highlight the risks of smoking, alcohol and substance abuse.
- Support community-based education campaigns that empower parents and extended families to take responsibility for healthy eating and lifestyles (eg local "Whanau we're killing the kids" programs along the lines of the TV program "Honey we're killing the kids").
- Encourage employers to offer healthy lifestyle incentives (such as a gym membership) as a supplement to sick day provisions in an employment contract prior to signing that contract.
- 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.

ENSURE A VIABLE HEALTH WORKFORCE

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Cut tuition fees for those studying medicine and nursing.
- Establish bonding schemes for graduates in fields facing workforce shortages (e.g. mental health nurses, child psychologists, pathologists, radiologists, radiographers, general practitioners, psychiatrists) into a period of service in New Zealand following graduation.
- 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.
- 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.
- Develop apprenticeship-style training for caregivers, allowing them to acquire qualifications while working in residential or home care environments, to ensure that they can develop a career path in this field.
- Localise the review of GP co-payments rather than the current expensive centralised review process.
- Support the ongoing development of Nurse Practitioners with scopes of practice for senior nurses.
- 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.
- Embark on a pro-active overseas recruitment campaign, and develop the concept of bonded "working holidays" for health professionals.
- Ensure that funding for the aged care sector covers staffing costs in both residential services and in-home care for better pay and conditions.
- Support pay parity between nursing staff across all nursing sectors.

IMPROVE THE HEALTH SYSTEM, RATHER THAN RESTRUCTURING IT

It is United**Future** policy to:

- 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.
- Commit to the public health model so that it continues to assume the key role in the provision of vital health services.
- Ensure that the health system is characterised by a climate of certainty by clearly defining core services, so that New Zealanders know where the public system covers them and where there is limited cover.
- Reduce waiting lists for elective surgery for those who are likely to wait longer than 6 months by requiring DHBs to contract out work to Private Hospitals.
- Extend Mobile Surgical Services.

- Review the administrative and policy compliance burden facing hospitals and GPs to free up resources currently dedicated to management, which should be directed towards actually making people better.
- Reduce the reporting burden to the Ministry of Health with a five year freeze on new requirements.
- 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.
- Ensure that ambulance and air rescue services are set and maintained at a level that does not compromise public and crew safety.
- Train and fund fully-crewed Ambulance Service.
- Increase funding for health research to bring New Zealand's funding up to at least the OECD average as a proportion of GDP.
- Encourage the development of integrated electronic medical records and prescribing systems to reduce medical errors, remind patients and physicians about preventative and follow-up care, and facilitate the sharing of integrated records and information across sites of care.
- Implement in full the provisions of Medicines New Zealand, the national medicines strategy we developed to ensure all New Zealanders get access to the medicines they need.

IMPROVE CHILD AND YOUTH HEALTH

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Fund Plunketline, separate to funding for Healthline.
- Ensure that information about immunisation is widely circulated, including the latest international developments, to promote informed decisions by parents.
- 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;
 - ensuring DHBs secure sufficient contracts with local Dentists for the provision of services to secondary students and additional services to Primary age students;
 - Increased use of mobile clinics in isolated communities.
- Replace current ad-hoc life-skill programmes with a core subject for Years 7-13 students called "Decision Making" that includes topics like personal financial management, career pathways, volunteerism, at-risk behaviours, civics education, parenting & child development with flexibility for school boards to tailor some content towards locally-identified needs.
- Improve workforce development and funding available for youth-focused counselling services as the first line of defence rather than over-prescribing pharmaceuticals for mental health concerns.

IMPROVE ELDER CARE

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Ensure that there are sufficient community nurses and other welfare agencies so that people can be treated at home where possible.
- Provide better incentives for the nursing, rehabilitation and treatment of the elderly in non-medical institutions, such as rest homes, at home and in retirement villages.
- Ensure that hospices are properly funded so that high quality compassionate palliative care is available.
- Ensure that resources focused on the acute health needs of the elderly are balanced by attention to those ailments that impact on their quality of life.
- Ensure that older people are fully consulted about their health care and are empowered to make informed choices.
- Re-assess the way in which the government funds aged care services, as part of a broader inquiry into future health care costs.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Encourage government agencies to work together on early intervention, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of mental health patients.
- Ensure that the right balance is struck between inpatient and community care to prevent people becoming a danger to themselves and society, but with recovery within the community remaining the goal.
- Increase resources for mental health professionals to ensure that those who may pose a risk to others or themselves are adequately assessed and treated.
- Increase the number of community-based mental health workers to ease high caseloads.
- Amend the Privacy Act where family members are primary caregivers so they may be fully informed of the care and release of their unwell relative, with consequential rights of appeal in decisions that place the patient in community or home care;
- Fund child and youth mental health inpatient beds at a level sufficient to achieve the Blueprint for Mental Health Services in New Zealand target level.
- Prioritise child and adolescent mental health to help avoid life-long difficulties.
- Tackle the issue of the lack of accommodation and employment support options for people recovering from mental health problems in the community.
- Resource adolescent mental health services to include 16 to 18 year olds.
- Monitor prescribing and treatment trends used in mental health and compare against international trends.
- Increase funding of drug, alcohol and mental health treatment for prison inmates.